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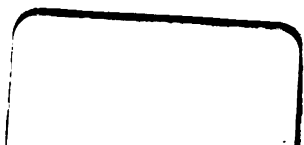
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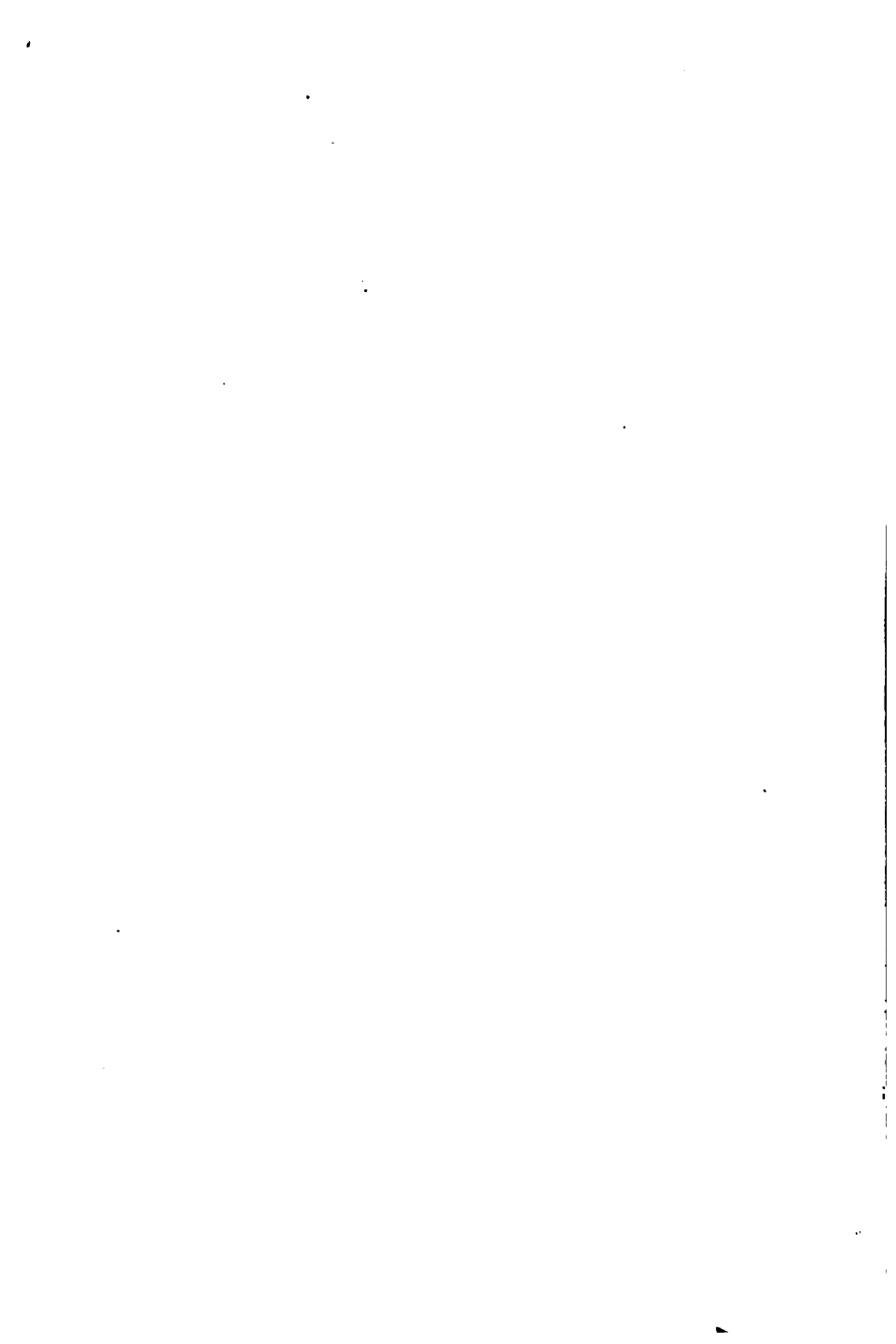
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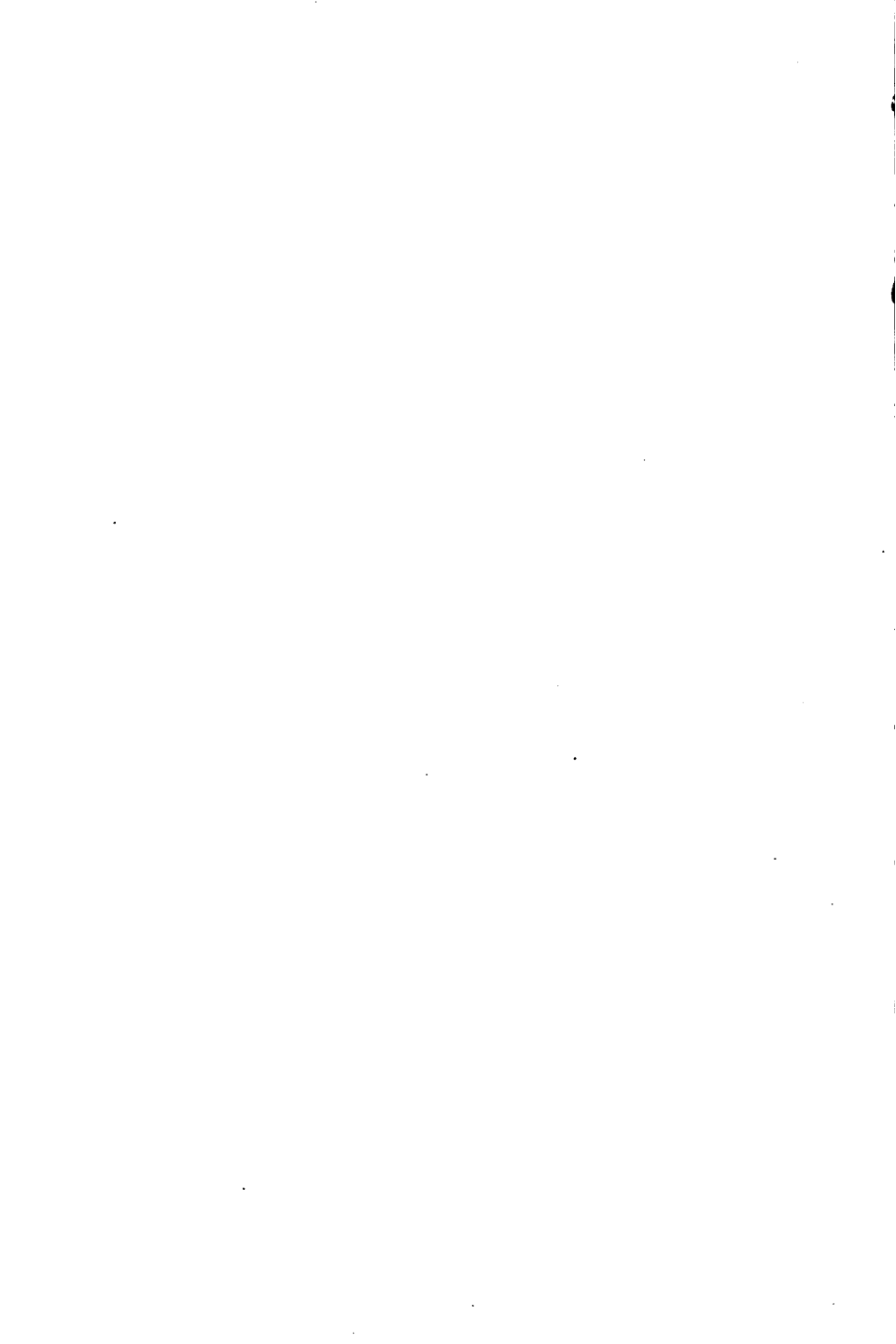
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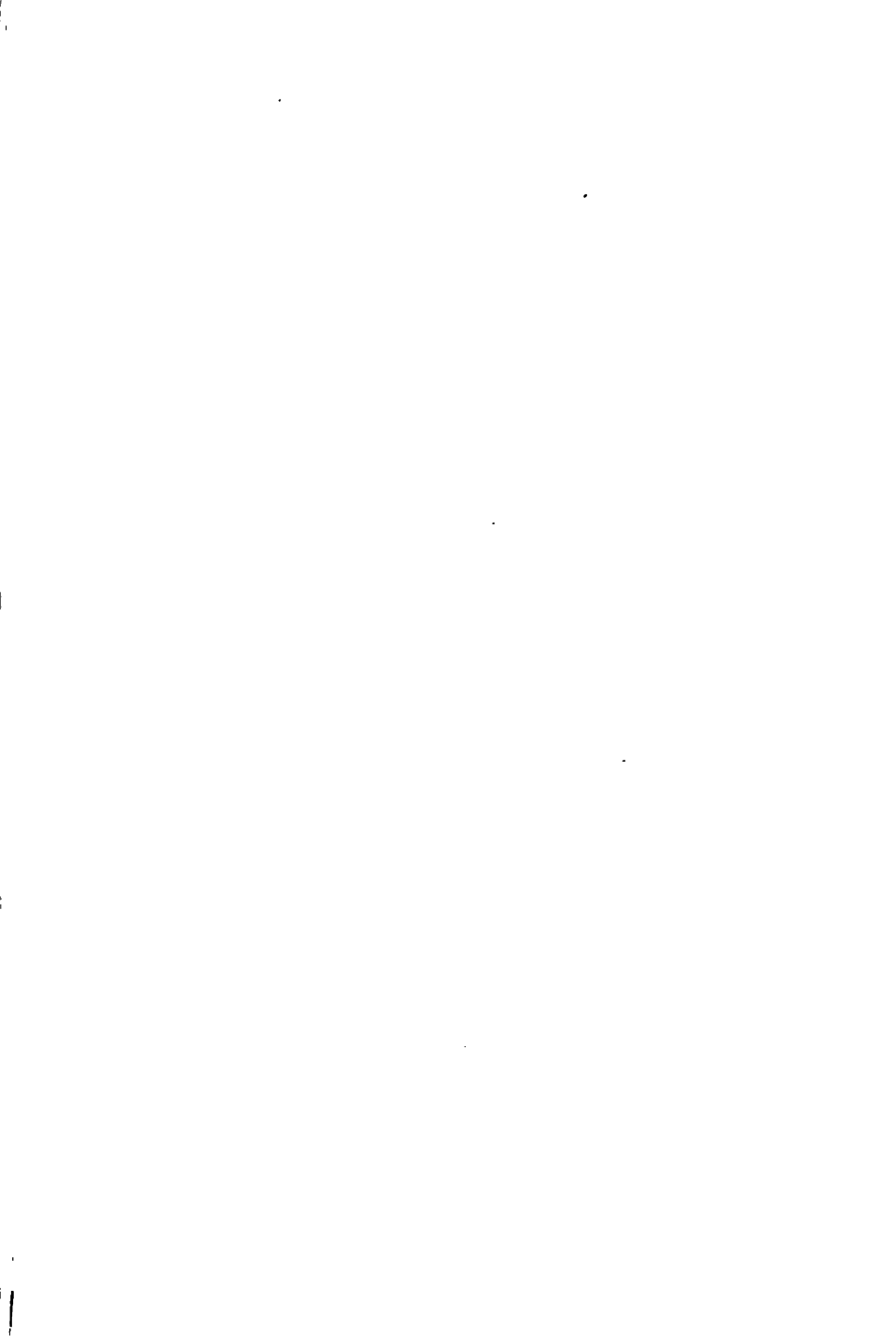






AT THE MIKADO'S COURT







“The American navy wins. Whoop!”

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AT THE MIKADO'S COURT

*The Adventures of
Three American Boys in Modern Japan*

By

HENRY HARRISON LEWIS



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TO MY SONS
HARRISON AND VARNUM



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CHAPTER I

THE SUBMARINE AND THE CRUISER

I TELL you, Larry, I heard the captain say it."

"It doesn't seem, possible, Wick."

"I don't know about that," stubbornly replied Wickford Ralston. "But I declare I heard the captain tell the first officer to see that no lights were displayed to-night. Even the running lights will not be used."

"Then it means that we are in the vicinity of Russian ships. Whew! I thought we were too close to the coast of Japan for that. What if we are captured?"

"The steamer would make a rich prize. I heard before we left San Francisco that she carries five million dollars in the strong room."

Larry Ralston suddenly grasped his cousin's arm and exclaimed excitedly:

"Wick, I forgot to tell you. We have a real sub-

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marine on board. It's on the forward deck under that canvas cover. Geel if we are caught with that, it will be all up with the whole ship."

Wickford Ralston's handsome boyish face lighted up with interest. He glanced toward the shapeless object which loomed big and cumbersome on the deck forward of the bridge, then he shaded his eyes and scanned the distant rim of the sea, which even then was turning a dusky purple under the last rays of the dying sun. There was nothing in sight, not even the gulls which had been their constant companions for days.

"I say, Larry, wouldn't it be a lark if we were caught?" he said eagerly.

Larry Ralston shook his head.

"Not much of a lark to a great many on board, Wick," he replied seriously. "Those three Japs who sit at our table would be thrown in prison, if not shot. And your father, you know. It might keep him from his post for some time."

Wick drew himself up, and his hands clenched.

"I'd like to see any Russian say much to father," he replied proudly. "They wouldn't dare touch the United States Minister to the Mikado's court."

"Well, I hardly think there's much chance," began Larry; then he pointed toward a tall, distinguished man,

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with an erect carriage and gray military beard, approaching them and added:

"Here he comes now. Let's ask him if there's any truth in the rumors."

Both Wickford and Larry affectionately waved their hands toward Mr. Ralston. The latter smiled as he saw this little demonstration. Despite his high official station and the many important matters engrossing his attention, he never failed in his love both for his son Wickford and his nephew Lawrence.

The diplomat's wife had died when Wickford was under ten, and the care of the child had devolved upon Larry's mother, who was the wife of Mr. Ralston's only brother. The two boys were thus brought up together and their friendship was more than cousinly.

When Mr. Ralston, who had served his native State of Indiana in Congress, had received from an appreciative President his appointment as Minister to Japan, he decided to take the two boys with him. Lawrence's mother was in somewhat feeble health, and it was thought best to have her remain at home until the legation at Tokio was in good running order. As Wickford was sixteen and Lawrence a year older, the boys were well able to look after themselves.

The little party boarded a Pacific Mail steamer at

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San Francisco, and after an uneventful voyage across the placid Pacific had arrived within sixty or seventy miles of the Japanese coast, when it became known to the boys that the steamer was in some danger of capture by Russian converted cruisers supposed to be lurking in the neighborhood. This was shortly after the destruction of Admiral Rojesvenski's fleet by the Japanese fleet under Admiral Togo, and before the Japanese had been able to clear the seas of the commerce-preying converted cruisers of the Russians.

The possibility of meeting a Russian ship was not at all remote, and it gave promise of a serious condition of affairs to the officers of the steamer and also several of her passengers. The presence on board of a submarine boat *en route* to the Japanese Government meant certain confiscation if it were discovered, and also the capture of a party of three Japanese naval officers who were accompanying it to Japan.

As Mr. Ralston neared the boys he saw that they were glancing toward the canvas-covered object on the forward deck, and his face became serious as he followed their gaze.

"I wish I had known the identity of that bit of freight before leaving San Francisco," he said half to himself. "It might have saved us trouble."

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"Do you really think we are in danger of being stopped by a Russian ship, father?" asked Wickford.

The eagerness plainly apparent in the lad's voice caused the diplomat to smile. Placing one hand caressingly upon Wick's head he replied banteringly:

"If I say no, I suppose you will be greatly disappointed."

"I wouldn't mind seeing a little fun," laughingly confessed Wick. "Just fancy what a tale it would make to tell the boys when we return home. Held up at night by a battleship and blown half out of the water."

"It won't be a battleship," corrected Larry. "It wouldn't be more than an old merchantman with a few guns on board and a hungry crew. There wouldn't be any glory in it, Wick."

"Always right in your arguments," pleasantly commented Mr. Ralston. "Your mind should be in an older head, Larry. You are right about the merchantman. And about the glory, too. It would mean a tragedy, especially to those Japanese officers on board here."

"Would they be killed?" asked Wickford.

"I don't know, son. In all probability they would attend to that themselves. You know that the Japanese have a most remarkable habit of committing what they call 'hara-kiri,' which is suicide by the sword. It

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is one of the most remarkable ideas of a remarkable race, and it shows their utter contempt for death."

"That is what makes the Japs such good soldiers, isn't it, father?" said Wick.

"That and their fine training, son. Ah, there's the captain. I want to have a word with him."

As Mr. Ralston walked toward the bridge the boys sauntered forward. Their thoughts were still centered upon the submarine boat, and they were drawn to the shapeless, canvas-covered object as if by a magnet.

"I wish we could examine the thing," said Wick. "Wouldn't it be great if we could take a trip in one?"

"I am afraid I don't care much for such voyages," laughed Larry. "I prefer to do my traveling on the surface of the water."

"That's just like you. Not a drop of sporting blood in your old carcass. You'd rather have a book and a quiet nook than anything else. As for me, I want the free, open air, the fun of riding and running and—" Wickford paused, and, impulsively throwing one arm about his cousin's neck, added apologetically: "That's too bad, Larry. I didn't think what I was saying. I forgot that you are lame and——"

Larry smiled and shook one finger warningly at Wickford.

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"Now stop that, will you?" he exclaimed cheerily. "Didn't I warn you about extending your sympathy to me? What if I have a game leg, don't I enjoy myself just the same? What's the difference after all? I confess I can't run and play ball, but I have lots of fun just the same."

He limped along at Wickford's side, and his good humor was so contagious that the other lad was compelled to laugh. The contrast between the two boys was strong. Wickford was a splendid specimen of the American lad. He was sturdy, broad-shouldered, and well set up; his handsome face and dark brown hair formed a very attractive combination. There was a flush of health in his cheeks that could come only from athletic exercise and a love of the open air.

On the other hand, Larry was rather pale and his face, seen in the evening light, seemed old-fashioned. He had queer, puckered eyes and many wrinkles here and there, but the chin was firm and resolute and the forehead lofty—marks of intelligence and great shrewdness. There was something in the pose of the body, however, that did not indicate either gracefulness or symmetry, and it was plainly evident that Lawrence Ralston was, perforce, a stranger to athletic sports and the open field.

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That the boys were great chums despite the difference in their physical make-up was plainly evident. Wickford's regard for the lame lad could not be doubted. And Larry, on his part, never tired of showing his admiration for his cousin's intelligence and athletic development.

"I wonder if we could get a peep at the boat," commented Wickford as they neared the object of their thoughts. "I confess I am dying to see what it looks like."

As he spoke he ran his hand along the outer canvas. Suddenly there came from within a muffled noise as if from a hammer beating upon metal, then the faint sound of voices speaking followed.

The two boys exchanged startled glances.

"There's some one inside," whispered Wickford.

"Probably the Japs," replied Larry in the same tone.

Wickford's eyes danced, and he began an inspection of the canvas cover.

"What are you doing?" asked Larry.

"If I can find a way, I'm going to crawl inside."

"Better ask permission first," warned Larry. "Perhaps they wouldn't care to have anybody——"

He ended with a gasp. Wickford had vanished before his eyes; there was a moment of silence, then the

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canvas began to move rapidly and Wickford backed out, flushed and excited. Following him came a short, thin-faced Japanese, who was bareheaded and evidently angry.

"You stay out of here, boy," he exclaimed harshly. "We do not want any visitors. You haven't any business prying on board our boat."

Wickford opened his lips, then compressed them as if on second thought.

"I beg your pardon," he said frankly. "I really didn't mean to intrude. I wanted to see the boat and thought you would not object."

"Well, we do," was the abrupt reply, and the Japanese officer turned and disappeared under the canvas.

Wickford looked at Larry and shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose I deserve that," he said. "But the fellow did not need to be so cross."

"I am surprised," commented Larry. "That's not like the Japs as a rule. They are extremely polite and slow to take offense. I guess he is worried."

A gong sounded from amidships. It was the first call to dinner, and the boys hastened aft to dress for the meal. The sun had disappeared, a great ball of fire, beyond the sharp line of the horizon, and night fell fast.

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It promised to be extremely dark, and a banking up of clouds toward the northeast portended rain squalls if nothing more.

The boys found Mr. Ralston in his stateroom. When Wickford, who had no secrets from his father, told him of the submarine boat incident, Mr. Ralston first smiled and then looked grave.

"That was Mr. Yatsui, I think," he said. "He is a very earnest man, and he and his comrades are in a rather ticklish position. In fact, I believe they are making preparations to put the boat over the side and get away with it if we are held up by a Russian cruiser. You need not repeat it, but that is what the captain told me. And now, Wick," he added to his son, "I want you to keep away from the boat and not interfere with anything you may see going on. Mr. Yatsui did right in rebuking you."

"Yes, father," agreed Wick promptly, "I think he did. But I would like to see the inside of the craft."

"You can wait until we get ashore. Perhaps I'll take both of you to one of the Japanese navy yards presently. There's the second call to dinner."

There was an air of suppressed excitement in the dining saloon when the diplomat and his companions proceeded to their seats. The minister's official rank

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was well known on board, and the passengers, the majority of whom were Americans, regarded him as one in high authority.

Shortly after dinner was served a messenger from the captain, who had remained on the bridge, summoned Mr. Ralston from the table. After he had left word spread like wildfire that a vessel had been sighted. With one accord the passengers deserted the saloon and made for the open deck.

"It may be nothing but a merchant steamer," said Larry as the two boys climbed the stairs. "Pshaw! what's the use of so much unnecessary excitement?"

"I hope it is a Russian," replied Wickford. "I haven't anything against that Jap, Mr. Yatsui, but I'd like to see him run for it. Gee! what a trip it——"

He broke off the sentence and stared after a man who had brushed past them. The man was short and thin, and he carried a traveling bag in each hand. He was evidently in a great hurry and quickly vanished in the darkness of the forward deck.

"That's Yatsui or I'll eat my hat!" exclaimed Wickford. "And say, Larry, he's got his luggage with him. I'll bet——"

"There goes Lieutenant Shimamura," interrupted Larry wonderingly. "And he has his luggage, too."

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They are getting ready to leave the steamer, as sure as fate."

The boys stared out into the darkness, where a wavering searchlight was beginning to send its slender shaft across the water. A moment later the finger of light fell upon the steamer and rested there. Then with a sullen boom the report of a gun broke the quiet.

"It's the signal to heave to," cried one of the passengers near the railing. "We are in for it now."

Wickford fairly danced with joy.

"Larry," he whispered, "let's go forward and see them lower the submarine. Hear the creaking of the blocks? They are lowering it now."

The hoarse bass of the steamer's siren sounded over their heads. One blast, another blast, and then a third. Then came that peculiar stillness of the hull which results from the stopping of a steamer's engines, and it was known that the Pacific Mail liner had obeyed the command of the stranger.

Larry began to expostulate with Wickford, but his own interest was so strong that he made only a faint protest, and followed at the heels of the more impetuous lad. As they made their way under the bridge they saw the tall figure of the diplomat. He was talking with

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the captain and the first officer, and seemed to be very much in earnest in what he was saying.

Forward of the bridge the deck was in darkness, but the boys were able to make out something large and bulky that seemed to be swinging in space just above the port railing. As they watched, there was a creaking of blocks, the shrill call of a boatswain's whistle, the tense straining of the great topping booms, and slowly the submarine was lowered over the side until it vanished in the darkness.

Completely engrossed in the scene, Wickford crept along the port railing. Presently Larry called to him, but the lad apparently did not hear him.

Grasping one of the foremast stays Wickford leaned out to catch a last glimpse of the submarine boat. At that moment the steamer gave a slight lurch as it rose upon a wave, and the motion caused the boy to sway outward.

A cry came from Larry. There was an answering shout—one of mingled fear and horror—then from over the side came the sound of a faint splash. Larry, sick and completely unnerved, groped blindly toward the place where Wickford had stood, then with a strident shriek for help he made his way toward the bridge.

CHAPTER II

"IT IS OUR INTENTION TO RAM THE CRUISER!"

AFTER the first sudden shock of falling and the subsequent plunge into the black sea, Wickford practically lost consciousness for a moment. When his senses returned he found himself battling for dear life in the midst of a smother of foam.

The darkness was so intense that he could see nothing at first save the wavering searchlight of the Russian cruiser and a series of round gleams representing the portholes of the steamer's saloon. The latter were not far distant and Wickford, buoyed up by a flash of hope, shouted at the top of his voice.

"Help! help!"

He thought he could distinguish signs of confusion and excitement on the liner, but he was not certain. There was no answering cry, and finally the effort to keep above water engrossed his whole attention.

His athletic training now stood him in good stead. He was young, strong, and a swimmer. The sea was

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rather rough, but the waves not high enough to cause him any great inconvenience.

Presently, while he was treading water to rest his arms, he saw through the gloom just ahead of him an object which seemed darker than the water. It looked like an overturned boat, and was floating idly upon the surface.

The lad shouted with joy. Striking out lustily, he soon reached the object and grasped at the side. His hand slipped as he made the attempt, and he fell back.

The surface of the object was hard, smooth metal!

Like a flash Wickford realized the truth. It was the Japanese submarine boat that had been lowered from the deck of the liner a short time before. For a moment Wickford's heart beat with relief; then he saw that he was still in great danger. It was one thing to be inside the craft shielded from the sea by its steel sides, and another thing to be struggling with the waves and apparently unable to communicate with those in the boat.

"If I only can make them hear me," he murmured.

He cast one last despairing glance about him. The lights of the steamer seemed farther away, and apparently nothing was being done to come to his aid. Just beyond the Pacific Mail liner loomed another craft alive

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with twinkling gleams. The searchlight on its bridge cut the darkness between the two vessels, and as Wickford watched a dark smudge appeared in the silvery path cast by the light. It was a small boat, but it was passing between the two steamers, and there was no indication that it was coming in his direction.

Spurred on by his peril, Wickford made another attempt to climb up the sloping sides of the submarine. Presently his hand touched an iron bar that encircled the craft like a railing. With this to aid him Wickford managed to gain the upper part of the boat, where he found a small round turret of steel. It also had an encircling rail which the boy grasped to steady his position.

The great feeling of security gained from the platform upon which he stood, and the hope it gave him of rescue, brought the tears to his eyes. He gulped hard, not caring to show what he considered a weakness even with none to observe him.

There was little time for emotion, however. The fact that the craft was a submarine and that it could sink at will speedily convinced Wickford that it was absolutely necessary to attract the attention of the Japanese crew without delay.

Holding tight to the upper rail he began to pound



"He was grasped by the leg and held as if in a vice."

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upon the steel deck with his feet, at the same time shouting at the utmost pitch of his voice. His efforts soon brought results. There was a grinding noise as of bolts being turned, then the circular top of the turret was thrown back and the head and shoulders of a man appeared in the opening.

Wickford heard an unintelligible exclamation uttered sharply, then he was grasped by the leg and held as if in a vice.

"It's me!" he exclaimed, forgetting his grammar in his excitement.

There was another exclamation in the unknown tongue, then the voice added:

"Who are you? How did you get here? Speak, will you!"

There was little of welcome in the tone, but Wickford was too overjoyed at the prospect of rescue to heed it.

"It is Wickford Ralston," he replied. "You know me. I am the son of Mr. Ralston, the Minister to Japan. I fell overboard a little while ago. Can't I come in?"

Another head popped up through the aperture, and the two Japanese began talking with every indication of excitement. Several minutes later Wickford was dragged bodily over the edge of the turret, the circular

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door was closed, and the boy found himself in absolute darkness.

The interior of the submarine was close and stuffy, and at first Wickford breathed with some difficulty. He heard the men moving about, then a match snapped and a tiny flame appeared within a few feet of him. Wickford saw that a hand lantern was being lighted. The man who held it was Lieutenant Yatsui, and the face revealed by the light was dark and forbidding.

In spite of his situation Wickford glanced about him with the liveliest interest. The submarine was one of the smallest of its class, and did not appear to be more than forty feet in length. At the deepest part, directly in the middle, it was just possible to stand erect, and one could almost touch both sides by extending the arms.

The interior was one long compartment arched almost in the shape of a circle. At the forward end was a mass of machinery, running along the sides was a maze of pipes, and arranged about a space in the center were a number of valves and indicators. Under other conditions Wickford would have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity so unceremoniously presented to him of examining the craft, but, as it happened, he speedily discovered that his peril was not over.

He noticed that Lieutenant Yatsui and his two com-

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panions were engaged in a discussion, and from the glances they cast at him, the boy felt that he was the object. He could not help feeling that his coming was not welcomed by the Japanese officers, yet he could not guess why.

"They surely understand that I can't help being here," he thought rather defiantly. "I didn't fall overboard because I wanted to."

Presently the three men turned toward him.

"We want to know some things," said Lieutenant Yatsui brusquely. "What were the steamers doing when you reached this boat?"

"I think the Russian was sending a small boat to the steamer," replied Wickford. "I saw something like one in the water between them."

"Was the liner moving?"

"I don't think so."

"Did you see the searchlight fall upon this boat?"

"No."

There was another brief consultation between the Japanese, then the lieutenant spoke again.

"We want to tell you, boy," he said harshly, "that we are very sorry you are aboard this boat."

"No more sorry than I am, Mr. Yatsui," replied Wickford with a frank smile. "I feel that I am intrud-

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ing, and I would give a great deal to be out of this and back with my—my father.” The boy’s voice quavered as he referred to his parent.

“Being sorry don’t help matters,” resumed the lieutenant. “You are here, and you must abide by the consequences.”

“Yes, sir,” said Wickford obediently.

“You may prefer to leave the boat and again take chances in the sea,” said the Japanese officer coldly.

“It will be better for you,” put in Lieutenant Shimamura.

Wickford glanced from one to the other in growing amazement. What could they mean? How would it be better for him to be back in the water waging a hopeless struggle for his life.

“I—I don’t understand you, sir,” he stammered. “Is this boat sinking?”

“No, but it soon will be,” solemnly replied Lieutenant Shimamura.

“Is it unseaworthy?”

The officers exchanged glances, then Lieutenant Yatsui said, with no trace of feeling or emotion in his high-pitched voice:

“Boy, within a couple of miles of us is a Russian cruiser. It is *our* duty to sink the enemy’s ship even

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at the cost of our lives. Every son of Nippon who loves his country is willing to die if need be, and we have decided to give our lives in exchange for that ship. It is our intention to sink below the surface and to ram the cruiser just as soon as our engines are in working order. Unfortunately we have no torpedoes, but we should be able to strike a vital blow with this boat."

"Those on board the Pacific Mail steamer thought we meant to escape," added Lieutenant Shimamura, smiling as if the whole affair was a comedy. "On the contrary we had this idea in mind several days ago, when it was rumored that the steamer might be held up by a Russian cruiser."

Wickford listened to him as if in a dream. Lieutenant Yatsui's statement that the Japanese officers intended to sacrifice their lives simply to destroy one Russian converted cruiser, seemed so ridiculous that he fully expected them to burst out laughing. He even smiled.

"Yes," he said politely, and waited for the cue that would turn the scene into a jest.

"I see that you do not quite understand," said Lieutenant Yatsui. "This is no play, sir. Within ten minutes we expect to be under way. Within the hour our work will have been accomplished. Now we will give you your choice. To remain with us is certain death.

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If we open the turret hatch and let you out you know what to expect. Well?"

There was a chill gripping at Wickford's young heart that sent the breath from him in gasps. He realized as if with a great shock that Yatsui spoke the truth. It was death in the submarine or no better chance outside.

The choice was given him. What should he say?

Wickford Ralston was no hero, but simply a sound, healthy American boy with a love of life. He was no philosopher regarding the world from a jaded period of years. Young blood ran riot in his veins, his mind was clean and vigorous, he had a great affection for those near and dear to him, and it was not possible for him to view the situation with the somber reflection of these Japanese fatalists. He was as brave as a boy of his nature must be, and it was not cowardice or a weak spirit that caused the tears to well to his eyes. He turned his head and drove them back, then he faced the waiting officers.

"I don't want to die," he said simply, "but if it can't be helped, it must be accepted."

"What is your choice?" asked Lieutenant Yatsui.
"Quick! We are losing time."

"I'll take chances outside," replied Wickford. His

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voice sounded faintly in his ears as if from a great distance. His knees trembled slightly and he leaned against the sloping side for support.

Lieutenant Shimamura sprang to the short iron ladder that extended into the little turret, and with a rapid movement shot back a lever. Then he lifted the steel covering and a breath of sweet pure air came down to those waiting below.

"Up with you," commanded Lieutenant Yatsui briefly.

"I would like to say good-by," murmured Wickford, extending his hand. "I am only a boy, but I think I can appreciate the sacrifice you are making. It is hard to give up life, but——"

The words died away in his throat. A shrill cry of rage sounded over his head, and the next second Lieutenant Shimamura had dropped to the bottom of the ladder and was shouting something in Japanese to his brother officers.

Lieutenant Yatsui brushed past Wickford so roughly that the lad was sent backward with considerable violence. As he recovered his feet he heard the Japanese officer call back a volley of orders. Shimamura and the third Japanese hurriedly began working with the engine. They lifted levers and turned little wheels, but

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to no apparent purpose. Presently Yatsui joined them, and the three labored like mad.

Wickford was consumed with curiosity. Watching his chance, he crept up the short ladder and peered about him in the darkness. At first he saw nothing, then as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom he caught sight of the Russian cruiser's searchlight. It was outlined against the blackness of the night, but apparently at a considerable distance. Of the Pacific Mail steamer there was no sign save a faint row of lights which, as Wickford watched, grew smaller and smaller, and finally vanished.

Wickford now understood the cause of the Japanese officers' excitement and evident anger. While they had been talking with him the Russian cruiser had completed its examination of the steamer, and was now out of reach.

The relief was so great that the boy threw himself over the edge of the turret hatch and burst into tears. Thus he was found when the Japanese came to him a minute or two later.

He fully expected to bear the brunt of their disappointment, but to his surprise they shrugged their shoulders and resumed their tinkering with the engine.

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"Better luck next time," said Lieutenant Shimamura placidly. "We can't catch them now, but perhaps we will have another chance."

In the course of an hour sufficient power was generated to send the submarine over the water at a speed of eight knots. As Wickford, still shaken and unstrung, settled down to watch the Japanese at their work, he noticed that only Lieutenant Yatsui still regarded him with ill-favor. The lieutenant, who evidently was in charge, took his place upon a small iron grating several feet above the floor of the boat. This brought his head well up within the turret and enabled him to steer the craft with the aid of a small wheel.

The space within the boat was small and there was no getting about with comfort, but after a while Wickford began to enjoy it. He saw that the intricate system of levers, piping, and valves lining the steel shell was so arranged that each man could do his work without moving from a certain seat. There was a gasoline engine, and also a small dynamo, and forward could be seen the breech of a businesslike torpedo tube.

Presently the boy's interest caused him to ask Lieutenant Shimamura if he could crawl forward and look around. Before that officer could reply, Lieutenant Yatsui called out harshly:

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"If you want to reach shore alive, stay where you are and hold your tongue. We've had enough disappointment because of you."

Wickford was on the point of replying, but he caught a warning glance from Lieutenant Shimamura and held his tongue. It was a severe strain on the boy's spirit, but he was sensible enough to realize that it would do him no good to enter into an argument with the officer, who evidently bore him no good will.

"You think because you are an American and the son of a diplomat that you can do as you please," continued Yatsui. "That's just like your countrymen. Just wait awhile. Nippon will show you, and will show the rest of the world. What she is doing with Russia is nothing. In time——"

Lieutenant Shimamura interrupted him with a few guttural words, and after a brief argument between the two men, Yatsui quieted down. Wickford kept his peace, but he made a mental resolution to have his innings if he encountered the officer ashore.

During the following ten hours the submarine tossed its way over the restless sea without mishap. Finally Wickford felt the boat enter a more placid stretch of water, and he knew that some harbor had been reached. This belief became a certainty when the submarine, in

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the course of the next thirty minutes, slowed down and presently stopped. Lieutenant Yatsui raised the turret hatch and stepped out upon the curved deck. A moment later Wickford heard him hail some one in a loud, sing-song voice. There was a faint reply, as if from a distance, then a boat bumped against the submarine's steel side.

"This is Yokosuka," said Lieutenant Shimamura kindly. "It is a naval dockyard on Yokohama Bay, and is about ninety minutes' ride on the railroad from Yokohama. We will put you ashore here, and you should have no difficulty in reaching Yokohama."

"Thank you," replied Wickford. "I shall be glad to get ashore."

The lieutenant glanced about him cautiously, then whispered:

"I am sorry Lieutenant Yatsui spoke to you as he did. He doesn't like Americans, and sometimes he forgets that he is a naval officer and a gentleman."

"I suppose the naval officer part of it is all right," replied Wickford, "but you will forgive me if I have my doubts about his being a gentleman. It was not my fault that I fell into the water, and I am sure it wasn't my fault that I found this boat. I am mighty glad that I did, just the same, but I haven't committed any great

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crime that Mr. Yatsui should abuse me like a pick-pocket."

"You are right," replied the lieutenant mildly. "I hope you won't judge all my countrymen by Lieutenant Yatsui. He really is not a bad man, but he has a bad temper. He is a member of the Samurai, the ancient nobility of Japan, you know, and at times he forgets he is clay like the rest of us. You will not complain of him to your honored father, I hope."

Wickford laughed.

"I don't bother him with such little things," he replied. "No, it is all right as it is. You were the means of saving me from the sea, and I am grateful."

A call came from the deck of the submarine and Lieutenant Yatsui's face appeared in the opening.

"Come up here, boy," he said. "There is a boat alongside that you can take to the dock. Make haste."

Wickford turned to shake hands with Lieutenant Shimamura and found that officer selecting a card from his leather case. He gave the bit of pasteboard to Wickford and said hurriedly:

"I have written an address in Yokohama on this card. If you have any trouble, go to that house and tell them I said to treat you as they would me. Now, good-by."

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"Thank you very much indeed," replied Wickford earnestly. "Please don't fail to visit us when you come to Tokyo. I will be glad to see you again. Good-by."

He ran up the ladder, and without a word to Lieutenant Yatsui took his seat in the stern of a queer-looking flat-shaped boat bobbing against the side. The lieutenant said something in Japanese to the boatman, the latter shoved off, and presently Wickford found himself moving toward a long dock dimly visible in the early dawn.

Wickford glanced back once. The three officers were grouped on the submarine's deck looking after him.

"I suppose it's foolish, but I don't like Lieutenant Yatsui for a cent," he murmured. "If I ever see him again, I hope we will be on equal terms."

A few minutes later the native boat ran alongside a low dock and Wickford stepped ashore.

"Japan at last," he muttered. "Now to get to Yokohama and find father and Larry. Poor old dad! I suppose he has given up his boy."

CHAPTER III

WICK MAKES AN ACQUAINTANCE

THE long hours spent in the submarine's stuffy interior had dried Wick's clothing, but the linen trousers and light coat were sadly wrinkled. His hat was gone, his hair tousled, and he hardly presented the neat appearance to be expected in the son of the United States Minister to Japan.

"I should be arrested on sight as a tramp if this was the United States," he muttered with a chuckle. "I wonder what they will do to me here. Don't seem to be any police about."

Yokosuka, which lies within ninety minutes' ride of Yokohama, occupies a charming position on a landlocked bay. Although it is the site of the first Japanese dockyard and is one of the empire's naval ports, its importance as a town is small.

As Wickford recalled from his studies of Japan, Yokosuka is the place where the Englishman, Will Adams, who was the first European to reside in the

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country, lived and died. As the boy looked about him in the growing light and saw the great buildings stretched along the shore, and the docks and lofty shears and all the fittings of an important and powerful naval station, he realized the wonderful change in the country since Will Adams, simple seaman and ship-builder, taught the Japanese their first lessons in the art of naval construction. It was here the Japanese patched up holes made by their own 13-inch guns in the captured Chinese battleships during the Japanese-Chinese war, and here that Admiral Togo's fleet had secretly prepared for the memorable destruction of the Russian Baltic fleet.

As the lad walked up the long commercial dock he heard a sound of drums and a bugle call from the harbor behind him. Looking back he saw several massive war ships and a number of rakish, low-lying torpedo craft riding at anchor. A black object, hardly distinguishable in the early morning light, seemed to be moving near the largest battleship, and Wickford saw that it was the submarine boat that had been so instrumental in saving him from a watery grave.

As he turned to resume his walk up the dock he almost ran into a boy of about his own age who had approached unnoticed. The stranger was rather stout

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and round-faced, and had a peculiar cast in one eye which gave him the appearance of winking. His clothes were of the rough ready-made variety generally found in the slop chests of over-sea sailing vessels. He wore a peaked cap, with a gilt anchor in front, but the cap was obviously several sizes too large for him.

That did not trouble him, however ; in fact, his broad, good-natured grin seemed to be a permanent fixture upon his rotund face. He gave Wickford an easy salute with one finger and said boyishly :

"Hello!"

"Hello!" replied Wickford.

"I'll bet a dollar you're an American."

"You win."

"Where's your hat?"

Wickford made a gesture toward the ocean and laughed.

"Back there somewhere," he said. "Guess some mermaid is wearing it now."

"Dropped it overboard, eh? Just get in?"

"Yes."

"Funny I didn't hear a steamer's whistle. Where's your boat?"

"She's out there among those war ships. I'm afraid you can't see her very well. She's a submarine."

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"Bedaddle! a submarine boat? You don't say? American?"

"No. Japanese."

"Well, what in thunder were you—there I go! Always asking something about what I haven't any business to know anything. Hey! What's your name?"

Wickford told him.

"Mine's Jehoshabeath Calkins Budd. Doesn't that jar you? Jehoshabeath was a Scripture character, you know. Lived two thousand years ago. Wish he'd never lived. Then I wouldn't have had his onery name. They call me Betty for short, too. Wouldn't it cinch you? Betty is a girl's name, and I ain't no girl; not by a long shot. What are you doing here?"

Wickford held back the laugh struggling to his lips. The fat boy was very funny.

"I am on my way to Yokohama to find my father and cousin. You see, I parted from them rather suddenly. In fact, I fell overboard from a Pacific Mail steamer, and was picked up by that submarine and brought here. May I ask what you are doing so far from home?"

"Bedaddle!" gasped Betty, whose eyes had grown as round as saucers. "Fell overboard, and picked up by a submarine? Bedaddle! that beats anything I ever

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heard. Wasn't it the most fun you ever had in your life? Say, I'd give——"

The sentence never was finished. With an agility remarkable in one of his build, the stout boy suddenly turned and fled up the dock, leaving Wickford staring after him in profound amazement. The next moment Wickford heard a shout, and a burly man dashed past him, breathing heavily.

"Hi, stop there, you Betty! Stop, I say!" cried the man. "If I catch you I'll break every bone in your fat body."

Before reaching the head of the dock he paused for want of breath and then turned back. In the meantime Betty had vanished past a freight shed.

"Was that tarnation boy talking to you?" queried the ship's officer, for such he appeared to be.

"Yes," smiled Wickford. "He said a few words. What's the trouble?"

"He ran away from my ship, and I want to catch him, that's all. He's my cabin boy. I let him come ashore yesterday morning and he should have returned last night. Say, if you help me catch him I'll give you a quarter."

"I am afraid I will have to decline the offer," smiled Wickford. "I am in a hurry to reach Yokohama. I

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guess he'll come back all right. He's having a little fun, that's all."

"He'll have more fun of another kind when I get him aboard," growled the captain, mopping his face.

He slouched toward the side of the dock and descended to a boat, evidently in hiding there. As Wickford moved away he saw him peep over the edge, as if he intended to keep a good lookout for the recreant cabin boy.

The street running parallel to the water front was broad and well-paved. Early as was the hour, there were a number of people abroad, and Wickford felt the strong air of excitement generally found at a naval station in war times. The great repair shops where Admiral Togo's mighty fleet had fitted out for its brilliant attack upon the Russian ships were working at full blast, and as the boy watched, a procession of uniformed sailors passed him on its way to a transport at anchor off the port.

Several jinrikishas passed Wickford as he sauntered along, and he looked with considerable interest at the peculiar vehicles. He had read that they represented the most common mode of conveyance, and that the word jinrikisha was Japanese for man-power carriage. He saw that it was a two-wheeled "small gig" or large baby-carriage, pulled by one or more men, and he

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recalled having heard a lecturer on Japan say that the men, or coolies, who pull the vehicles develop swiftness and endurance, and that the business of transportation furnishes occupation to more than two hundred thousand people.

After walking a short distance Wickford heard the whistle of a locomotive, and he presently saw a building which proved to be the object of his search—a railroad station. He was extremely anxious to reach Yokohama as quickly as possible so that he could acquaint his father of his rescue. Fortunately he had with him four English sovereigns, carried in a belt in case of need, so he felt that he was provided with sufficient funds.

He did not attempt to purchase a hat, as he knew it would be difficult to find an English-speaking merchant in Yokosuka.

"I guess it won't hurt me to go bareheaded a few more hours," he decided. "People may think me a curiosity, but then they have that opinion of every foreigner anyway."

There was an open space in front of the railway station, and as Wickford started to cross it he heard some one calling him from behind. He turned, to see a stout youth running up the street and gesticulating frantically.

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"I say there, you," panted Betty, for it was the recreant cabin boy, "wait a minute, won't you? Bedad-dle! you can walk like a daddy long-legs."

"I am in a hurry," smiled Wickford. "By the way, some one was asking for you back on the dock. He was pretty anxious to see you."

"It was Captain Peters, I'll bet a doughnut," gasped the stout boy. "He can go to blazes. I won't go on his old ship again, if I have to swim home. He's a big bully, and he thinks a cabin boy ought to be fed on rope yarn and sleep once a week. See this?"

Betty brushed back his hair from the left forehead and revealed a long scar, still red from recent healing.

"There's where I got it with a belaying pin. Captain Peters lammed me one because I spilled a drop of soup on deck. That's his way to teach a fellow."

"He's a brute," indignantly exclaimed Wickford. "Why didn't you give him one in return?"

"That would have been mutiny, and I'd have been sent to prison for two or three years. No; when you are on the high seas and one of the ship's officers gives you a licking it is called enforcing discipline, but if you strike back it's mutiny."

"I don't blame you for running away. But what will they do if you are caught?"

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"I ain't going to be caught," vigorously replied Betty. "I am going with you."

"With me?" exclaimed Wickford in amazement.

The stout boy grinned.

"Does it surprise you, Mr. Ralston?" he asked wistfully. "I guess I hadn't ought to have broke it so sudden. I mean it, though. When I saw you down on the dock I liked your face, and I told myself that you would be a friend. Honest now, I am alone here. I haven't a soul to help me, and I don't speak this 'Chink' lingo for a cent. I haven't any money either, but I can work, and I'll black your boots, honest I will. I just won't go back to that ship and be kicked about like a dog. Say, Mr. Ralston, don't you want a good, faithful friend to run your errands for you?"

Wickford was nonplussed. He had not anticipated this result of his chance meeting with the stout boy. He sympathized with Betty, and felt that he had received sufficient provocation for his act in running away, but the idea of taking Betty with him either as a friend or as a retainer was preposterous. What would Mr. Ralston say? Yet, on the other hand, Wickford felt that he did not want to leave the stout boy in Yokosuka without money and without friends.

"Well, you beat me," he finally exclaimed, inclined

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to laugh but recognizing the seriousness of the situation—at least to Betty. “I don’t need any servant, and I wouldn’t let you be one if I did. I would like to see you get out of Captain Peters’s reach, but——”

“Bedaddle! there he comes now,” suddenly interrupted Betty, pointing toward the main street. “Quick! let’s get out of sight.”

Before Wickford could do more than catch a fleeting glance of Captain Peters, Betty had dragged him unceremoniously past the station and to the platform. A train, made up of first-, second-, and third-class coaches patterned after the English style of short cars and side doors, was just beginning to move.

A uniformed guard was in the act of closing the door of a first-class carriage. Acting on the spur of the moment, Wickford cried to Betty to follow, and dashed past the guard. The next moment they were inside the carriage, the door closed, and the train rolling away from the station.

Betty leaned back in the seat and chuckled until his sides shook.

“Bedaddle!” he gasped.

“Well, I’ve gone and done it now,” admitted Wickford. “Betty, you are good for Yokohama anyway.”

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"I don't care where it is, so you don't lose me," replied the fat boy. He settled himself in the seat and beamed good-naturedly.

Wickford glanced about the narrow compartment and saw that it contained two other occupants. These were men who, from their clothes, evidently were Europeans. One was tall and rather lean, with a swarthy face and an iron-gray mustache.

The other was a very large man, apparently of more than two hundred pounds in weight. His face was smooth and he wore a monocle, or single eyeglass, screwed into his right eye. Wickford saw that the two men were watching them, and he bowed politely.

"They are not natives," he heard the lean man say in English.

"No, Girard," replied the other in the same language. "They're English, from appearances. From some ship in port, I suppose."

"That tall lad has been overboard. His clothes are wrinkled and he has lost his hat. I say, Beaumont, I'll wager they have jumped their ship."

Wickford began to feel uncomfortable. It was not a very pleasant situation for the son of the United States Minister to Japan. He rather regretted his impetuosity in permitting the stout boy to accompany him,

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but now that he had taken the step he had no intention of backing out.

He smiled at Betty and said in a low voice:

"Did you hear that? They think both of us have run away."

"Bedaddle! they can mind their own business," replied Betty. "We are not interfering with them. I wouldn't care for the King of Japan now. Ain't we out of Captain Peters's reach?"

"I am not so sure about that," replied Wickford slyly. "If he saw us board the train he'll telegraph ahead and have you arrested."

Betty looked toward the open window of the carriage in alarm. The next moment the train began to slacken speed, then with a grinding of brakes came to a full stop. A few scattered houses and a platform showed that it was a small station.

A guard came to the door and said something in Japanese to the boys. Wickford shook his head and replied:

"I do not understand."

The man who had been called Girard by his companion leaned forward and explained:

"He wants your tickets, my lad. Where are you going?"

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"To Yokohama, sir. We haven't any tickets, but I will pay the money. Do you know how much it is, sir?"

"In this carriage, which is first-class, the fare is one yen. It is only thirty sen, or about sevenpence ha'penny, second-class. The yen is half a crown, you know."

"Thank you, sir," replied Wickford, producing a sovereign. "We'll pay first-class."

He gave the coin to the guard who, at a word from Mr. Girard, made out two tickets, and returned a handful of small Japanese silver and a few banknotes to Wickford. The door was closed and the train rolled away again, much to Betty's relief.

The boys very soon became greatly interested in the novel and really charming scenery. The road skirted a beautiful bay and wound about highlands and small mountains. There were broad stretches of open country occupied to the last rood with paddy fields or small farms. There were quaint-looking people with conical straw hats and single cotton garments, and here and there could be seen ancient temples, generally occupying the summit of some higher peak.

It was very attractive to the boys and they discussed the various objects in low tones. The train rolled along at a moderate speed, the engine sending forth

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shrill warnings at road crossings, and the English-built cars with their rigid bogie-trucks grinding noisily against the rails at every curve.

It was just after the train had suddenly passed from one of the curves to a straight stretch of track with a quick cessation of the grinding rumble that Wickford, who had almost forgotten the presence of the men in the carriage, heard one of them mention a familiar name.

The word, which came sharp and distinct, was the name of his father!

Turning, Wickford saw the two men with their heads close together. They were talking earnestly, and in French. The lad instinctively felt a strong desire to find out what they were saying about his father, and he thanked his lucky stars that the French language had been prominent in the curriculum of the private school he had attended.

Wickford was not given to eavesdropping, but with boyish thoughtlessness he yielded to an overwhelming curiosity and listened. The large man, whose name evidently was Beaumont, was speaking. His voice was low, and he cast an occasional glance at Wickford and Betty. The latter was entirely absorbed in watching the scenery, and Wickford seemed engrossed in the same task.

"He arrives to-day," said the stout man. "I am

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glad of it, as this long waiting is deuced monotonous. I suppose you know that I met Ralston at Washington while on a visit to the States, but I hardly think he will remember me. He is a very determined man, and exceedingly capable. He will not stand any fooling, you know."

His companion's reply was indistinct, and Wickford, by this time deeply interested, caught only an occasional word. As he recalled it afterwards, the words were:

" . . . no question about . . . proposition. He can't possibly refuse to . . . duty as the United States Minister . . . certain to believe them to be authentic documents . . . treaty. Remember . . . five thousand pounds in addition to . . . all yours if we succeed."

The swarthy man's voice trailed off and presently his companion replied, but the rumble of the train was so loud that Wickford could not distinguish the words. He had heard enough, however, to make him believe that the two men were discussing something connected with his father's mission to Japan, and from the tenor of the conversation he felt in his heart that the something was suspicious, to say the least.

Wickford grasped the seat with both hands. To hide his flushed face he glanced out of the window. Never before in his whole life had he felt so intensely interested and excited.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE RAILWAY CARRIAGE

PRESENTLY Wickford felt a hand placed softly upon his shoulder, and turning he saw that Betty was eying him with some anxiety.

"What's the matter?" asked the stout boy. "You're trembling like a weather leech in a Dutchman's hurricane. Ain't sick?"

"No—no," hurriedly replied Wick; then he added in a whisper:

"Please don't speak for a minute. Just look out of the window and act as if you were watching the scenery. I want to hear something."

The men were still talking, and presently Wickford caught an occasional word as before.

"We must not be too sure . . . a little trouble," Mr. Beaumont said. "Since Roosevelt has assumed office . . . much larger interest in international politics . . . that Japan can't afford to . . . fact. You know what . . . last week."

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Mr. Girard thrummed upon the window sill with his fingers, but did not answer.

Suddenly the stout man with the single eyeglass turned away from him and faced the two boys.

"I say, youngster," he called out to Wickford in English, "what's your name and where do you live?"

Wickford reddened and caught at his breath in evident embarrassment. During the past few minutes he had been thinking rapidly. That his father was the subject of the Englishmen's conversation there could be no question. Some extremely serious and highly important complication evidently faced the American Minister, and these two men undoubtedly were involved in it.

The boy felt instinctively that he should conceal his identity, but at the same time he did not wish to tell a downright falsehood. He was no prig, but his early training had led him to believe that truthfulness was as necessary as honesty.

"I say, what's your name?" repeated Mr. Beaumont with some insistence. Edging along the cushioned seat, he calmly fixed his gaze upon Wickford. To the boy that single glass seemed an accusing optic, and he writhed uncomfortably.

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It was Betty who finally solved the problem. The fat youth suddenly giggled and burst in with the utmost friendliness:

"Were you asking our names? Say, you'll laugh when you hear mine. I've got a handle that'd make angels weep. Say, did you ever hear of Jehoshabeath? He was one of them Scripture characters you read about. Lived two thousand years ago. Died because he couldn't spell his own name, I'll bet. People don't call me all of them syllables at the same time. It's been shortened to plain every-day Betty. If you want to address me, just say Betty, and say it nice and easy."

Wick laughed heartily. The opportunity offered him by Betty was too good to be lost. He saw both Mr. Beaumont and Mr. Girard smile as if amused, and the latter said banteringly:

"Jehoshabeath, eh? It is a deuced rum name, don't you know. Fancy being called Jehoshabeath. But Betty is a girl's name, and there you are."

"Bedaddle, I'm no girl!" grinned Betty.

"English lads, I suppose?" queried Mr. Beaumont.

Wickford nudged his companion. The situation was becoming dangerous again. He felt more than ever determined to conceal from the Englishmen the fact that he was the son of the American Minister to Japan.

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Naturally of quick perception, he realized that it was possible he could be of some assistance to his father.

He did not know what to do—he was drifting vaguely; but the belief that he must not only hide his identity from these men, but also use every effort to gain still further knowledge of the plot evidently being discussed by them became stronger with each passing moment.

It was a strange situation for Wickford Ralston. Events similar to those of the past few weeks did not always fall to the lot of a modern American boy of sixteen. Wickford's young life had been spent in a humdrum manner at school, with only one break of a few months at Washington during his father's service as congressman, and he had not encountered many of the world's vagaries.

And now within the space of a month he had launched forth upon a voyage to a strange and, to him, unknown land, had faced death in the merciless sea, had cruised in that wonder of wonders—a submarine boat, and was confronted by a mystery which seemed about to encompass the one he loved best on earth—his father. The lad did not realize it, of course, but within the hour his boyish views of life and its secrets had become those almost of a grown man.

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This retrospection lasted scarcely a moment, then Wickford returned to the embarrassing question asked by Mr. Beaumont.

Just as he was about to reply frankly, denying that he was English, there came a prolonged blast of the locomotive whistle and the brakes began to grind against the wheels of the railway carriage.

Mr. Girard peered through the window and uttered an exclamation.

"Hello! What's this?" he said.

As the train slowed down and then stopped, a Japanese official, evidently an inspector, looked into the carriage. Back of him were several uniformed police.

Wickford heard a cry that sounded more like a squeal of fright, and Betty sprang across him. The stout boy seemed terror-stricken, and cowered behind the two Englishmen in a frantic effort to hide himself.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Beaumont wonderingly.

Wickford jumped to his feet and, placing his back to the narrow side door of the English-built carriage, arranged his coat so the officials could not see past him. The door was locked, but the glass in the upper part had been lowered, and the boy felt some one endeavoring to push him aside.

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"Get away," cried the person in English, but with a strong Japanese accent. "Open in the name of the law."

"What's all this about?" demanded Mr. Girard loudly. "Boy, stand back from that door."

"They are after my friend," replied Wick hurriedly. "He ran away from a ship where he was being ill-treated, and now the captain has telegraphed to have him arrested. Oh, sir, won't you help him? I know he has been abused. You can see the scars on his head where he was knocked down with a belaying pin. Won't you keep him from being arrested, sir?"

The two men exchanged glances.

An instinctive desire to take the part of the under dog caused them to listen with evident sympathy.

"It's deuced queer work, but we'll help you," exclaimed Mr. Girard. "Here, slip out of this window, you young beggar, and take your chances."

While Mr. Beaumont lowered the sash, Mr. Girard grasped Betty with his powerful hands and literally forced him through the opening. As the stout boy vanished, Wickford was thrust aside and the angry face of the Japanese inspector appeared behind him.

"What is the matter here?" he demanded peremptorily. "Why did you block this door? I am an in-

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spector of customs, and my orders are to look for a package placed on board this train at Yokosuka. Please stand aside and permit me to examine this carriage."

"Then you are not looking for—" began Wickford in relief. He stopped short and, springing to the opposite door, thrust his head through the opening.

The train had stopped on what evidently was the edge of a city of considerable size. In the distance was a glimmer of water, and the masts of many ships riding at anchor could be seen above the flat roofs of a row of "godowns" or warehouses.

Several native workmen stood near a line of freight cars on a siding. These men, and a couple of boys who had been playing in a puddle of water, looked as if in astonishment after the figure of a stout boy just disappearing under one of the cars. It was Betty making a home strike for freedom.

"Hi, Betty!" shouted Wick at the top of his voice. "Hi, there, come back! Everything's all right!"

But the fleeing lad did not turn back, and Wickford reluctantly withdrew into the carriage. He found his two companions and the inspector exchanging explanations and courtesies. Mr. Beaumont had given the official a card which seemed to impress the man. As Wickford faced them again, Mr. Girard was saying:

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"The boy thought you were looking for him and he took his hook, don't you know. He's from one of the ships in Yokosuka; been bullyragged and all that, don't you know. Thought he would try liberty in your tight little island. Don't blame the beggar if all I hear about brutality on shipboard is true. Did you see him, youngster?"

The latter question was addressed to Wickford, who shook his head in reply. At the rate Betty was traveling, he was out of sight and sound long before this.

"I am afraid it will be difficult to find him, sir," said Wickford. "He skipped under those cars and is half-way to the water's edge by now."

"Are you going to look for your friend?" queried Mr. Beaumont. "The train will start soon, and you may lose him."

Wickford had been thinking rapidly. He liked Betty. There was something singularly winning in the stout boy's presence. His good nature and sunny smile, his jokes and frankness, all appealed to Wick, and he would have been delighted to know more about Betty; but there was a stronger and more important task demanding his attention.

"He will follow us to Yokohama, I am sure," Wick replied. "By the way, isn't this place on the

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outskirts of Yokohama? It seems to be part of a large city."

It was the customs inspector who replied.

"The station is only a mile from here," he said politely. The credentials displayed by the Englishmen had softened his former anger to a degree. With a respectful salutation he stepped back from the door, a signal was given, and the train moved on.

Only a mile. Wick glanced toward the door. For a moment he half made up his mind that he would leave the carriage after all and see what had become of Betty. Then a resolution that had been taking shape became a certainty.

"It is up to me to see who these men really are," he murmured. "They may be attached in some way to the British Embassy here, or to the English diplomatic corps, and I must—I must find out what they are plotting against father."

The lad knew that it would be a most difficult, if not impossible thing for him to do, but with the dogged determination which was such a characteristic part of his nature, he made up his mind that he would solve the mystery in some way.

By now the train was passing rapidly along a wide thoroughfare, which seemed to be a much-used highway

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between the little station at which the train had stopped and the main station at Yokohama. There was much of interest for Wick to see in the teeming panorama of Japanese life, but he was too intent on watching his companions to give heed to anything else.

Presently the cars came to a stop with a grinding noise and a shudder. Mr. Beaumont, who had hastily risen to his feet, exclaimed:

“By Jove! here we are at last. Yokohama, and——”

He sank back with a half-suppressed exclamation, and gripping Mr. Girard's arm added excitedly:

“Sh-h-h! There's the man himself. See the tall, fine-looking chap near that pile of luggage. That's the new United States Minister to Japan—it's Ralston!”

CHAPTER V

THE MAN IN THE JINRIKISHA

WICKFORD RALSTON did not know it, but in that moment rested the greatest test of his life. Never before in the sixteen years of his existence had he been torn by such conflicting emotions. He sprang to his feet and was half-way to the door before he realized that he must not follow the dictates of his desire to hasten to his father and Larry if he was to carry out the resolution he had made.

Through the open window he saw his parent. The well-known features were in plain view, and the expression of sadness outlined there caused the lad to swallow hard and to gulp back the emotion that was fast filling his eyes with tears.

And Larry, the lame boy, was standing with one hand resting caressingly upon his uncle's arm. His face, too, was sorrowful, and he paid little attention to the novel sights surrounding him.

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"They think I was lost," murmured Wick. "Poor dad! And poor old Larry! What a surprise I have in store for them! Won't there be high jinks when they find that I am here in Japan and not at the bottom of the sea! Ugh! I am almost——"

He paused as he saw several Japanese officials in uniform approach his father. They saluted most respectfully; then two men, evidently Americans from their appearance, joined the group. There was an exchange of greetings, and finally, while Wickford watched with beating heart, his father, Larry, and the two Americans boarded a train which almost immediately moved off.

"I wish I could go with them," murmured the lad wistfully. "But I must wait a little while. I know they are going to Tokyo, and as soon as I settle upon what these Englishmen are trying to do, I'll beat the band getting to dad and Larry. Perhaps I will write or telegraph pretty soon."

By this time Mr. Girard and Mr. Beaumont had left the carriage and were surrendering their hand luggage to a native hotel porter. Wickford edged near the Englishman in time to hear Mr. Beaumont tell the porter to take the bags to the Grand Hotel.

"That's all I want to know just at present," Wickford muttered. "I'll look about for a while and see if

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I can arrange any plans. I haven't the remotest idea what to do, but I suppose something will turn up."

"Going to wait here for that fat friend of yours?" called out Mr. Girard.

Wickford nodded.

"He will be along soon," he said confidently.

"Egad! you two lads are like the babes in the woods," smiled Mr. Beaumont. "Both ran away from home, I suppose. And now you are seeing the world with never a care for the morrow. Got any friends in Yokohama?"

"No, sir," replied Wickford truthfully.

"What do you think of doing?"

"Haven't decided just yet," this with equal truthfulness.

"Wouldn't advise you to look for work in this country, my lad. It isn't London, you know."

"Here are the jinrikishas from the hotel," spoke up Mr. Girard. He turned away with a wave of his hand to Wickford. Mr. Beaumont started to follow, hesitated, then looked back.

"I say, my boy," he called out, "if you don't mind what work you do, perhaps I can get a place for you."

"Thank you, sir," replied Wick politely.

"Can you write well?"

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"Fairly well, sir."

"You talk and act as if you had a decent education. Been to Harrow or Rugby?"

Wick had heard of these famous English schools. He could truthfully say that he had not attended either.

"Never even seen them, sir," was his candid reply.

Mr. Beaumont stood in thought for a moment, then he followed his friend, calling back as he did so:

"We'll be at the Grand Hotel until evening, then probably go to Tokyo. Any person will show you where the hotel is. Drop around during the day."

Wick felt immensely relieved as he returned the salutations of the two men. The offer made by Mr. Beaumont might mean a chance to keep in touch with the "enemy," for that was how he had decided to consider them.

"It gives me more opportunity than I had an hour ago," he muttered as he turned away. "Perhaps he means to offer me a job where I can be with him. I hope so, anyway."

As Wick passed from the station out into the bustling street, going he hardly knew where, he came upon a crowd of natives—men, women, and children—that had gathered around something which was evidently a source of considerable amusement. Wick noticed a

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policeman in the center of the crowd, and the officer seemed intent on soothing a stout youth clad in poorly made ship's clothing.

"I no see your friend what you say is a 'Merican boy," explained the policeman placidly. "I no see him here nor anywhere. I can't help it if I no see him. What you think?"

"But he came into this railroad depot, I tell you. It's your business to know where people are. Why, back in Boston the police know everybody by name and——"

"Betty!" called out Wick over the heads of the crowd. "Betty, be careful what you say about Boston."

A shout of joy came from the stout boy, and he plunged almost headlong to where Wick stood smiling and really delighted to see him. The policeman grinned sympathetically, then dispersed the wondering spectators, leaving the two boys shaking hands.

"I knew you would turn up again," laughed Wick. "I tried to call you back, but you were making a mile a minute down the road. I wonder you didn't fall off the edge of the island. Say, those officials weren't looking for you, you silly."

"Didn't Captain Peters send them?" gasped Betty.

"No. They were after a smuggled package or some-

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thing," replied Wick; then he added slyly: "Don't think you are of such great importance. The ship can go back without your aid."

"Bedaddle, it'll have to! But say, I'm tickled to death to find you. I thought when I took a header through that window that I'd seen the last of my best friend on earth—now, don't say you ain't, sir—I knew the moment I saw you back in that town that you were the best ever, and I want you to know right now that you can't lose your little Betty. Honest, Mr. Ralston——"

"Here, none of that," interrupted Wick with a laugh. "Don't 'mister' me. I am plain every-day 'Wick'"—he hesitated, then added with a winning smile—"to my friends."

The stout boy's face fairly beamed, and he grasped Wick's hand, shaking it heartily. Several men—a porter in a conical straw hat and bearing a box strapped to his shoulders, a quaint little Japanese peddler, and two well set-up soldiers, prim and sleek in their natty uniforms—paused and watched the lads. A little woman with starched obi and neat gown teetered up on high wooden shoes and peered at the boys, to their evident embarrassment. The friendly policeman who had talked with Betty came sauntering back.

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"Whew! we are giving these people a free show," exclaimed Wick. "Suppose we find a place where we can get something to eat and have a talk."

"Eat!" fairly shouted the stout boy. "Eat! Be-daddle, I am tickled to death! Say, I haven't had but three dinners in two days. Hurry, if you want to save my——"

He stopped short and looked at Wick with such seriousness that the latter felt alarmed.

"What's up now?" exclaimed Wick.

"I haven't a cent to my name," replied Betty mournfully.

Wick laughed.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"How can you eat without money?"

Wick emptied the contents of one vest pocket into his left hand. There was a miscellaneous collection of gold, silver, and paper money.

"Three English sovereigns, and all this Japanese money," he explained. "Let me see, this is a silver yen, that means about fifty cents in our money; this paper bill is a five-yen note; and these nickel pieces are five sen each, or two cents and a half. Now, Betty, we have between us—I say 'we,' mind you—we have about eighteen dollars. They are yours as well as mine, and

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I would like to add that there is more money where this came from, so just keep that mouth of yours closed until we get something to put in it."

Betty tried to hug Wick, but the latter eluded him.

"Didn't I tell you that I hadn't made no mistake," breathed the stout boy. "You're a friend for keeps. I won't say that I can't let you help me, but I'll tell you this much, the day may come when Jehoshabeath Calkins Budd—count the words—will be able to pay you back. Now, for goodness' sake, let's eat."

The policeman had approached near enough to overhear the final sentence.

"You want to breakfast?" he asked politely. "I show you place where you can get good chow like English, or good chow like they make in my country."

"Thank you," replied Wick. "I think we will try the chow made as in your country. We may as well get accustomed to Japanese food."

The officer ambled off in evident delight. He led them down a cross street into a narrow thoroughfare which literally swarmed with people. It was a strange and most interesting sight to Wick and Betty. Hundreds and hundreds of men, women, and children were promenading the street and the sidewalks, laughing, talking, and enjoying life in their own happy way.

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The stores on either side were open, without even a window to separate them from the throng. Here and there could be seen merchants who had spread their wares upon strips of matting laid over the stones, and it was not uncommon to see a group of fifteen or twenty gathered around one of these street venders, who declaimed in sonorous tones the merit of his goods.

Hucksters peddling sweets hurried through the crowds crying "Hi! hi!" and men bearing bundles of newspaper extras containing the latest information from the war rapidly sold their wares to the eager crowds.

"Bedaddle! look at that grandfather selling papers," chuckled Betty. "Say, the kids in Tremont Street back home would run him off the block."

"Can we get papers published in English?" Wick asked their guide.

The policeman turned into a shop that had the air and furnishings of an American or English cigar and stationery store. A man, evidently of German extraction, stood behind the counter.

"Hello!" he said. "Lost your hat, eh?"

Wick instinctively put his hand to his head. He had forgotten that he was still bareheaded. He smiled and replied easily:

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" Yes, dropped it into the water. I suppose I can buy one here? "

" Down the street at No. 32. They have pretty much everything. Speak English, too. Can I do anything for you? "

Wick glanced over the newspapers spread out upon the counter. He saw a number printed in English—the *Japan Mail*, the *Japan Herald*, the *Japan Gazette*, the *Daily Advertiser*, the *Box of Curios*, and the *Eastern World*. The *Daily Advertiser* was lying uppermost, and the lad read the head line at the top of the first column with a start. It ran in bold type:

"AMERICAN MINISTER'S SON DROWNS AT SEA!"

Immediately following came a double-leaded paragraph which evidently had been set up at the last moment and inserted in the paper just before going to press. The statement was brief.

" The Pacific Mail liner *Condor*, due at Yokohama this morning, reports by wireless an encounter with a Russian cruiser off the coast last night. One of the new submarine boats recently ordered abroad formed part of the *Condor's* cargo. Despite the presence of the Russian, the submarine was lowered and, manned by three Japanese naval officers, made good its escape. During the excitement Wickford Ralston, only son of the new

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United States Minister, the Hon. George Ralston, fell overboard and was lost."

"I'll take this paper," said Wickford unsteadily. "It contains a very interesting news item."

A few minutes later when he and Betty, thanks to the good offices of the policeman, were seated in a quaint little Japanese restaurant, he quietly placed the newspaper before the stout boy's eyes and said:

"Read this, and then we'll talk over matters."

Betty dropped the chopsticks with which he was hopelessly trying to eat from a bowl of rice, and fairly gasped:

"Bedaddle, don't you tell me you're that boy! Your father the American Minister to Japan? Git out!"

Wickford explained patiently and in detail the events of the past twenty-four hours. He did so with the greatest relief, as he felt compelled to make a confidant of some one. He wanted a friend with whom he could discuss the strange situation in which he found himself, and to whom he could turn for advice.

Although he had known Betty only a few hours, yet there was something in the stout lad, in his bearing, in his great frankness and friendly speech, in his most winning air of loyalty, that caused Wick to feel that he could trust him.

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Betty's engrossing interest in the story was proved by the fact that he left his meal almost untasted. He drank a cup of tea in an abstracted manner and rolled little pellets of bread crumbs as he listened. When Wick had quite finished, Betty's first words were:

"And now you are going to see your father right away, ain't you?"

"I thought you would suggest that," replied Wick earnestly. "You surely can understand how much I want to see daddy and Larry, but is it the best thing? I am positive those two Englishmen are plotting against father, and about something of the greatest importance. I know that father was sent here on purpose to arrange about a treaty, because I heard him tell one of our Government officials." Wickford held up his head and added proudly:

"President Roosevelt himself selected father because he thought he was the best man in the United States to carry out his plans. And I'm going to do all I can to help him."

"Bedaddle, and I'll do all I can to help both of you!" cried Betty with fine enthusiasm. "I'll go over to that hotel and knock the blocks off of both of them Britishers if you say so."

Wickford smiled.

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"I really believe you would try, Betty, but this isn't a case for knocking off blocks. It's a case where we've got to play diplomacy. Auntie says it runs in our family. I don't know, but I intend to do what I can. And now the first thing is to telegraph."

"To your father?" queried Betty as they arose from their awkward position upon the mat forming the Japanese table.

"Yes. I'll wire him that I am here, that I was rescued by the submarine, but that I cannot come to Tokyo just yet."

"Perhaps he'll make you."

Wickford shook his head.

"No, father has always trusted me," he replied simply. "You see, we know each other better than most fathers and sons, and when I tell him that it is absolutely necessary for me to stay away for a while, and for him not to let people know where I am, he'll do what I ask."

"You would have to tell him you are safe, anyway," suggested Betty, "because the Japanese officers on that submarine will make it known. I'll bet a cooky the newspapers have it now, and so will the people in Tokyo, or whatever you call the place."

"I have thought of that," replied Wick gravely. "The Japanese officers, Lieutenant Yatsui and the rest,

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may report the matter, and then again they may not. The Japs have their own way of doing things, you know. They can give the other nations a twenty-yard start and beat them a mile in some phases of war, and one of their best virtues is to say very little. However, it doesn't make any difference whether those Jap officers tell or not. Now for the telegraph office."

"Sayonara," smiled the proprietor of the tea house, an elderly Japanese, as the boys left. "Mata-Irasshai."

"That's Jap for 'Good-by. Please come again,'" explained Wick.

"Say, you talk their language, don't you?" exclaimed Betty admiringly.

"Only a few words. I know about enough to get into trouble if I try to say anything, that's all."

After purchasing a hat at the address given by the German, who also told them the way to the telegraph office, Wick beckoned to a group of jinrikisha men. A half dozen answered, and a great jabbering followed as to who would secure the call. To the boys' amusement, one of the men finally took from his pockets six pieces of cord, one of which he handed to each contestant. Each man held one end of his cord; the other ends were twisted together. Then the self-appointed arbiter stepped forward and took hold of two of the loose ends.

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The men holding the corresponding ends won, and the lads were soon whirling away in the novel vehicles.

"Bedaddle! if Captain Peters could see me now on the quarter-deck of this craft," gasped Betty.

The distance to the office was covered in short order by the fleet runners. Leaving Betty with the 'rikishas, Wick entered and began the extremely difficult task of framing the message. It was a difficult task because, try as hard as he could, the moisture would fill his eyes each time he attempted to tell his father that he was alive and only a few miles away instead of at the bottom of the remorseless ocean.

The first message was read over carefully and then torn in fragments. The words had sounded cold and spiritless. Then Wick was seized with an inspiration.

"I just can't telegraph to dear old dad," he said. "I'll send it to Larry and let him break the news." This is what he wrote:

"MR. LAWRENCE RALSTON,

"Care of the United States Legation, Tokyo.

"Larry, I am alive and well. I was picked up by that submarine. There are very important reasons why I cannot come to Tokyo now, and you must not look for me. Tell dad all about it, and say that I send my undying love to him. Beg him not to make me come to Tokyo for a few days. What I am doing is of the

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greatest importance to him. He will believe me. He always does, dear old dad. Will write fully soon. Good-by.

"WICKFORD."

"Don't care if it costs all I have in the bank at home," Wick murmured as he paid the charge. "Wish I had made it even longer."

His mind was greatly relieved as he rejoined Betty. Now that he had taken steps to let his father and Larry know that he was still alive, he felt free to do everything in his power to unravel the plot being hatched by the two Englishmen.

"We'll go down to the Grand Hotel now," he said to Betty as they were drawn away in the jinrikishas. "Perhaps that job will be just the thing I want."

They had barely left the telegraph office when another jinrikisha drew up and a lean, swarthy, sunburned man dismounted. He glanced after the lads and muttered:

"Why, they are the two boys we saw in the train. Been telegraphing, eh?"

He entered the office and started to write a message upon one of the blanks. A half-torn paper caught his eye and he picked it up from the table. The few words

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it contained caused him to throw back his head and whistle in apparent amazement.

"Well," he said finally, "this is a rum go. It is in a boyish hand all right, and the ink isn't dry. It looks as if that tallest boy had written it. What has he to do with the new United States Minister to Japan that he can wire to him so freely? And Beaumont is thinking of engaging him as a sort of assistant private secretary. Whew!"

CHAPTER VI

WICK MEETS A DRAGON AND SEES A NOVEL RACE

WICKFORD and Betty found jinrikisha riding far more attractive than they had anticipated. The picturesque, light, springy vehicles whirled through the streets in a most pleasant manner, and Betty in particular derived keen delight from the agile way in which his runner avoided collisions with other jinrikishas.

"I never thought I'd be driving a colored man in a wagon," grinned the fat youth. "Bedaddle! I'll bet a cooky it's all a dream. Don't wake me up, for goodness' sake."

"It's no dream," laughed Wick. "But say, Betty, don't let these Japs hear you call them colored."

"They ain't white. See that horse I've got. Charcoal would make a gray mark on him."

"He's sunburned, that's all; his natural color is tanyellow. Betty, if that jinrikisha runner should hear himself alluded to as a horse, there would be an outbreak of hostilities between Yokohama and Boston."

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"Guess I'll have to wear a muzzle," grumbled Betty good-naturedly. "This country is upside down and front side back."

"That's right enough to us," laughed Wickford. "The Japs have some queer ideas—at least they are queer to us. Father engaged a Japanese tutor for Larry and me during the few months between the time when he was appointed and the date of sailing, and I learned a lot about the customs of this country. What do you think, they always write from left to right, and up and down instead of across the page. And they begin at the back, too. Yes, and we eat soup first while they always take it last."

"Yes, and from the looks of them," commented Betty, "they grow from up downward instead of from down upward. And I'll bet a cooky they play baseball with a pitchfork and with marbles as big as pumpkins."

This conversation was carried on with some difficulty, as the boys rode in separate vehicles which were not always side by side. It was such a novel experience, and withal so pleasant that Wickford yielded to a boyish temptation and told the coolie runners to take them about the town before proceeding to the Grand Hotel. The runners understood enough "pidgin" English to understand.

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Wick and Betty gave themselves up to a thorough enjoyment of the ride, and for the moment the Englishmen, their mysterious plot, and all serious subjects were forgotten.

The jinrikishas and their runners first attracted attention. The sturdy coolies, clad in their cool costume of loose coat and waistcoat and tights of dark-blue cotton, straw sandals on bare feet, and a funny looking straw hat resembling nothing more than a washbowl, presented a most picturesque spectacle as they nimbly trod the street.

Their shoes, or waraji, as they are called, were plain sandals of the cheapest construction, made of rice straw, and held to the foot by the big toe. The boys noticed that a coolie did not stop to pick up a waraji when dropped, but sped along to a convenient spot, and then produced a new sandal from some fold of his garment.

"Say, if we'd do that back home," called out Betty, "we couldn't find cows enough to furnish the leather. They must grow on trees in this country."

"They almost grow in the field, I believe," replied Wick. "Every farmer and almost every laborer makes them. You can buy a dozen for a postage stamp or thereabouts."

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Another thing the boys observed was that some unwritten rule of the road caused the jinrikishas to follow one another in regulated single file and on the left side. There was little quarreling and none of the abuse practiced by the drivers of other countries.

Here and there in the streets they met heavily loaded carts or drays being pushed by coolies, who bent to their work with a hoarse chanting similar to the calls used by sailors on board ships. There were horses, of course, but few compared with the number employed in our street work. Occasionally an Englishman or American would appear mounted upon the shaggy little Japanese horses, but the general beast of burden seemed to be the coolie.

The street scenes were of absorbing interest to Wick and Betty. Their jinrikishas were whirled along past low-roofed shops, each with its row of gayly colored paper lanterns so large in size that many of them seemed veritable balloons.

Turning a corner from Benten Dori, the principal shopping thoroughfare, the boys caught sight of a queer procession. A gong, terrifically booming, filled the air with a brazen sound. In the midst of this noise came an occasional yelping, as if from a frightened animal. Its source, however, was a long reed instrument

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being sounded by a tall Japanese in pale-green cotton clothes, who headed a procession of several dozen mummers.

As the boys watched from their jinrikishas, the crowd separated, leaving a broad open space down which crawled a most wonderful monster. It was a dragon with fearful jaws and serried ranks of gilded teeth. His mask was intricately carved with all the strenuous grotesqueness of Japanese ingenuity.

His fierce eyes, beneath horribly knitted brows, were glaring as if in anger, and a hoarse mumbling noise came from the enormous mouth. The crowd of spectators, among whom were many children, shivered as the monster slowly paraded the street, and a shout went up as the thing halted in front of the jinrikishas containing Wick and Betty.

At first the fat boy half rose, as if to seek safety in flight, but the smile on Wick's face reassured him, and he settled back with a dubious grin.

"Bedaddle! if that thing should crawl down Tremont Street, or across the Common, they would call the police," he exclaimed. "I suppose it's a Japanese joke, eh?"

Wick nodded and carelessly tossed a few sen down the yawning throat of the monster, as he had seen several



"The fat boy half rose, as if to seek safety in flight."

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do along the street, then he signed the coolies to proceed.

"It's only a street show," he told Betty. "The players are doing it for what they can collect. I suppose they make a living that way."

After a time the jinrikishas turned into a long, gayly decorated street which Wick recognized from a description as Isezakicho, or Theater Street, as it is known to all foreigners.

"Bedaddle, this is great!" cried Betty enthusiastically. "Say, it's like a country fair in New England."

It was hardly that, however. To Wick it was the most interesting and novel panorama he had ever seen. For almost a mile stretched a crowded thoroughfare which seemed to be literally lined with theaters, side shows, merry-go-rounds, catchpenny games, and almost every imaginable form of amusement.

Hundreds of men, women, and children promenaded the street and sidewalks in the merriest of moods. Laughing and joking they patronized this candy shop or that restaurant, or bought from the swarm of strolling cooks who trundled their little kitchens along or swung them on a pole over their shoulders.

There were dealers in a kind of ice cream made from ice shavings and sprinkled with sugar, and there were

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men selling soba, a native vermicelli, and other peddlers who for a copper sen heat a big gridiron and make a batter cake which, served with a sirup, did not look so very bad.

From the front of many of the shops extended long poles carrying quaintly painted banners, and strung in front of others were queer-shaped lanterns, some resembling huge fish which swam in the breeze as if alive. There was a constant beating of drums and cymbals, and many of the spectators sang as they strolled along.

As the two jinrikishas moved slowly down the street, Wick and Betty looked about them with staring eyes. Never in all their lives had they experienced anything so intensely fascinating.

"It's worth coming to Japan just to see this street," murmured Wick. "I'd give a good deal if we could spend the whole day here. What a fine time one could have in one of those theaters."

"I say, Wick, I've got the scheme of my life," suddenly called out Betty, his eyes dancing with excitement. "There's a million in it."

"In what?"

"Why, this whole crazy show. Say, I'm going to find a man with money enough, and we'll buy this street

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and move it over to Boston Common. Bedaddle! we'd have to keep people away with a club, so many would want to buy the first ticket. Isn't it a dandy idea?"

Wick laughed.

"Your name ought to be Barnum instead of Betty. But say, what's that coming along?"

Far ahead of them rose a cloud of dust, through which could be seen several rapidly moving jinrikishas. The crowds in the street fled to the sidewalks as if in alarm. As the jinrikishas neared the boys they saw that it was a race between three of the queer vehicles. Instead of the usual coolie, each carriage was pulled by a man in sailor uniform. And the passengers were grinning, shouting sailors.

"Hi there, clear the track!" shouted the occupant of the foremost carriage, standing up in his excitement. "The American navy wins. Whoop!"

Almost alongside was the second jinrikisha, the wheels within an inch of locking the first. This carriage had a perspiring British sailor as a runner, and a young English jacky in the seat. The third vehicle was manned by two German sailors. It was a race for international honors.

As the whirling trio swept past the boys, Betty stood up and shouted at the top of his voice:

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"Go it, you Yankees! Bedaddle, you'll win in a walk!"

Wickford laughed until his sides ached. There was a slight descent in the street where they had stopped, and the impetus gained by the three rivals had forced them into a series of leaps and bounds that momentarily threatened to bring disaster. It was very funny, nevertheless, and even the Japanese spectators shouted with mirth.

Suddenly a policeman darted from the sidewalk and stood waving his arms directly in the path. He was seen to leap aside, but not quickly enough. The shaft of the foremost jinrikisha caught him under the arm and he fairly flew through the air, landing upon his hands and knees in the gutter.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH MESSRS. BEAUMONT AND GIRARD LAY A TRAP

THE discomfiture of the policeman aroused the crowd to greater mirth, which was short-lived, however. Several other officers suddenly appeared, and in a twinkling the racing sailors were halted. No attempt was made to arrest them, and after mutual explanations and much good feeling the party of sailors strolled away in quest of further adventure.

"Jack ashore is seldom bothered," commented a foreigner standing near the boys. "Sometimes it is necessary to curb his enthusiasm, but as a rule the Japanese police treat him with consideration."

"Bedaddle, we won anyway!" spoke up Betty.

As it was now past noon, Wick indicated by signs that he wished to be taken to a restaurant. The coolie runner grinned and nodded his shaven head, then started off at full speed with Betty bringing up the rear.

The eating place, similar to that wherein they had partaken of breakfast, was Japanese in character, and

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the boys had another opportunity to practice with chopsticks. The restaurant was of the better class, and the furniture more elaborate.

Betty giggled as a pretty nesan, or serving maid, placed a lacquered ozen, or table, not four inches in height, before him.

"Bedaddle! I'll be as old as Granny Hopgood back home before I get used to this sort of performance," he said. "What would mother think of her darling Betty sitting on his hunkers in front of a doll's table like this? And say, Wick, get on to these chopsticks. They're fastened together like the original Siamese twins."

"That's to show that they have not been used before," replied Wick. "Don't you see that each pair comes in an envelope?"

"How do you like them?" asked Betty slyly.

Wick attempted to pick up a boiled egg, but dropped it into his lap. He tried it again, but with like results. One of the nesans approached and bowed politely.

"Me show you," she said in broken English. "Me like to show how use chopsticks. It so hard for peoples to know how. You take stick like this——"

Bracing the chopstick firmly in the angle of the thumb, she held it immovable with the tip of the third

finger, then she grasped the second stick with the thumb aided by the first and second fingers, and moved it freely, playing against the other stick. As a final test she lifted and held an egg in its slippery shell so deftly that it was perfectly balanced.

"Now, you try," she smiled.

Wick's face showed his embarrassment, but he made the attempt and succeeded much better than he had anticipated. The pretty nesan complimented him on his cleverness, which only increased the flush which reddened his face.

"You do, oh so much better than plenty peoples who come here. You soon use chopsticks just like my people. Now, I show other young mans."

She moved toward Betty, but that ingenuous youth drew back in alarm.

"Say, I guess I won't learn to-day," he exclaimed. "Thank you awful much, but—but I guess I'll use a spoon or something just now. Much obliged, ma'am."

"You are a fine American, Betty," chaffed Wick as they left the restaurant. "Scared out of your wits by a mere girl. Huh! I thought you had some nerve."

The fat boy looked sheepish.

"I wasn't scared of her, honest," he protested. "But I didn't want no girl hanging her arms about my neck

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showing me how to work a pair of drumsticks. I'm not like some boys I know, who would run a mile to get another lesson like that, bedaddle!"

It was Wick's turn to avert his face, and he hastened to change the subject.

"Now for the Grand Hotel and my new job," he said as they called the jinrikishas.

"I don't know about this job of yours," replied Betty dolefully.

"What's the matter?"

"What will become of me? Do you think Mr. Beaumont will give me a job too?"

"It won't be necessary," replied Wick promptly. "It is only temporary, you know. If Mr. Beaumont really gives me a position, I'll take it only for the purpose of being near him. That is the most I can do."

"As a man back home said once to a fellow who was trying to milk a cow on the run, you've got a hard task before you. I declare I don't see how you can hope to do anything with those men, really I don't."

Wick paused with his foot on the step.

"To tell the truth, Betty," he replied soberly, "I don't see what I can do myself. The odds are strongly against me. All I know is that these two men are in a game of some kind, and against my father. They prob-

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ably have something to do with the English diplomatic corps. I know that father was sent here to watch the political end of the war and to see that the United States was not involved."

"Don't you think it would be better for you to go straight to your father and tell him all about it?" said Betty earnestly.

"What can I tell him?"

"Why, that you overheard those men mention his name and—and——"

The stout boy stammered helplessly.

"Yes, I can tell him that, but what does it amount to? What good would it do father to know that some people are plotting against him if he doesn't understand how they are doing it? No, Betty, it is absolutely necessary for me to learn just what the men are planning. You may think it is spying, but I can't help it. I am no sneak, and I don't think it is sneaking to help my father in a game of diplomacy like this. If Mr. Beaumont gives me a chance to enter his employ, I'll take the chance and do what I can to help my father and—and my country, for that is what it means."

The ride to the Grand Hotel was made without incident. While the boys are on the way, we will look in on another scene which is destined to have an important

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bearing on Wickford Ralston's attempt to participate in an interesting chapter of our diplomatic history.

The Grand Hotel, situated directly on Yokohama Bay, which it faces, is a favorite resort of foreign visitors. That fact, however, was not the reason why the two Englishmen had selected it as a rendezvous.

Foreigners of note, especially those connected with diplomatic affairs, generally patronize the Yokohama United Club, but there are times when diplomacy desires a different sort of meeting place.

It was high noon, and tiffin was being served by a suave Japanese waiter in a room on the second floor of the hotel. Seated at the table were Mr. Beaumont and Mr. Girard, the latter attired as if he had just entered. Scattered about the spacious apartment were several open hand bags.

It was evident from the attitude of the men that some important subject was under discussion. Mr. Beaumont, his single eyeglass screwed tightly in his left eye, seemed particularly disturbed.

"Are you quite sure, Girard?" he said rather impatiently. "Isn't it possible you made a mistake?"

His companion silently indicated a fragment of paper resting upon the table in front of Mr. Beaumont's plate. The latter picked it up and read abstractedly:

“ ‘Hon. George Ralston, United States Minister to Japan, United States Legation, Tokyo. Don’t be sur—’ ” The writing ended abruptly where the paper had been torn across in a jagged line.

“ It was certainly intended for Ralston,” mused Mr. Beaumont. “ But was it written by that lad? ”

“ I do not think there is any doubt,” said Mr. Girard emphatically. “ I saw the two boys leaving the office, and the ink was still wet on that telegram.”

“ I presume you are right,” confessed Mr. Beaumont. “ Now, what shall we do? We were so confounded free with our tongues, and the boy may have understood what we said, even if we did talk in French. Like fools we mentioned Ralston’s name.”

“ It is due to us to arrange matters so this boy cannot tell his father.”

“ How do we know he has not wired him already? ”

Mr. Girard smiled grimly.

“ We will know very soon,” he replied. “ I have arranged for copies of all messages sent by the boy, getting them through Kananeji, you know, and I also have had the boys followed. They started for a jinrikisha ride about town. We should— Come in! ”

A knock had sounded at the door. In obedience to

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Mr. Girard's call, a little Japanese, sleek and smiling, entered and handed him a telegraph form.

"This is the only message filed by Wickford Ralston," he reported stolidly. "The boys did not call again at the telegraph office, they did not telephone, nor post a letter. They have been seeing the town, and will be here in twenty minutes."

The messenger slipped from the room after an elaborate bow, leaving Mr. Girard smiling with satisfaction. He handed the message to his friend with the words:

"This settles it. The boy is Wickford Ralston. If he knows what we said and if we permit him to warn his father, it will start a train of investigation that'll effectually stop our scheme."

"What do you suggest?"

Mr. Girard hesitated a moment, apparently in deep thought, then he suddenly brought his hand down upon the table with a bang that set the dishes rattling.

"Beaumont, you know me," he said in almost a whisper. "You know why I was sent here and the vital importance of carrying out the plan. It must not fail. Think what it means to you. It's safe, man; there's no chance of discovery. I will not permit this Ralston boy to stop me, and you can wager your last shilling on that."

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His friend adjusted his glass in an agitated manner.

"But we can't make way with the lad, don't you know," he expostulated.

Mr. Girard laughed, but there was little of mirth in the sound.

"This is not the seventeenth century, nor are we actors in a melodrama," he replied. "Of course we can't make way with the lad, but there is one thing we can do."

"What?"

"Hide him away somewhere so that he cannot tell his father. I think the best plan is to have you engage him as a sort of assistant private secretary, as you had intended, and send him into the interior to some quiet place where he will not be found."

Mr. Beaumont glanced at the speaker, then he said eagerly:

"You are right. We must keep him away from Ralston until the thing is settled. I know just the place. You remember Utamaro."

"The chap who was attached to the Japanese Legation in London several years ago, and who got into trouble with the authorities about smuggling?"

"Yes. I helped him out of the scrape, and he has been deuced grateful. He is living near Hakone Lake,

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and I understand has an ideal place for this sort of thing."

"Good. Couldn't be better," exclaimed Mr. Girard. Then he added rapidly: "We mustn't lose any time. When the boy comes here, talk with him as if you are interested in giving an English lad a start in life—he pretends to be English, you know—then engage him and we'll take him to your man Utamaro. Once in some secluded spot like those abounding near Hakone, I defy anyone to find him. And say, Beaumont, lay your plan so no blame can be attached to us in the future."

A knock sounded at the outer door.

"It may be the lad," whispered Mr. Beaumont, straightening up.

"Come in!" shouted Mr. Girard.

The door opened and Wickford, smiling apologetically, entered the apartment.

"How do you do," he said. "Mr. Beaumont, you asked me to call, and I——"

"We are glad to see you, my lad," said Mr. Beaumont cordially.

"Yes, we are glad to see you," echoed Mr. Girard. "Have a cup of tea."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHANGHAING OF JEHOSEBEATH CALKINS BUDD

IN the interval after leaving the restaurant, Wick had settled several questions in his mind. He had solved the problem of an appropriate name, and also had decided what to do with Betty.

"Fortunately I have two middle names," he told the fat boy as they approached the Grand Hotel. "Mother had two favorite uncles, and she gave me their names in addition to Wickford. To these Englishmen I will be Charles Edgar."

"Hello, Charlie," grinned Betty.

"As for you, I think you had better go straight to Tokyo. I'll give you a letter to Larry—dear old man—and he'll take care of you until I turn up. What do you think of the plan?"

"Not much," said Betty promptly. "You've got another guess coming to you. You can't shake me like that, Charlie." He changed his tone and added pleadingly:

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"Now, please don't send me away, Wick. Let me go with you. I won't be in the way, and you know you want somebody to tell your plans to. Let me stay around somewhere so that you can find me at any moment. Perhaps you don't think I amount to much simply because I like a joke and maybe play more than I should. But I'll tell you, Wick, I can fight and I can work for those who—who are good to me, and you've been good to me, better than anybody I know. Now, just let me stay, won't you?"

The jinrikishas were moving slowly side by side down a narrow street, and Wick was near enough to his friend to catch a glistening bit of moisture in Betty's eyes. The friendliness and loyalty of the stout boy appealed strongly to him.

"I'll see about it, Betty," he said finally. "Perhaps I won't get a job after all. Well, here's the hotel. You wait outside, please. I won't be long."

The scene near the hotel was of sufficient interest to hold Betty's attention for some time. Several steamers filled with sight-seeing tourists had reached Yokohama that day, and it seemed to the lad that the majority of the travelers had elected to reach the Grand Hotel at the same hour.

Jinrikishas fairly swarmed about the entrance, and

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the strident cries of the coolie runners bidding for customers reminded the stout youth of the insistent hawkmen outside the South Station of his own beloved Boston.

The many hawkers of the streets appeared as if by magic. Little, wizened old men bearing alleged Satsuma ornaments, agents for curio shops, pattering coolies decked out with advertising signs, tailors' assistants with samples of Japanese cloths, young girls carrying the typical paper umbrella, with babies tied to their backs, and the inevitable masseurs, both men and women, blowing wooden whistles—all made up a pandemonium very entertaining to Betty.

Presently, while he watched with open mouth, a gorgeously clad juggler appeared and began to set up his properties in front of the hotel. A crowd instantly gathered, and Betty directed his coolie to move over to a better vantage place.

"Bedaddle! it's going to be something fine from the looks of things," he murmured. "I wish Wick was here to see the fun."

The juggler, who seemed to be a very old man, began his performance with a long speech which appeared very funny to his listeners, except Betty, who understood no word of it. Then the man lighted a small

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paper wand and thrust it, burning fiercely, into his mouth. He gulped once or twice, then began to cough up a succession of amazing objects—eggs, needles, lanterns, yards of paper ribbons, and finally a small balloon which floated upward and changed into a shower of paper flowers just over Betty's head.

At last, as his greatest piece of magic, the juggler produced an openwork basket about three feet in height. This he placed over himself and crouched upon the ground until the basket completely covered him.

"Now watch him closely," said a voice near Betty's ear. "He will disappear while you look."

Betty was so engrossed that he did not turn round. He hardly winked, so intense was his gaze. He saw the outline of the juggler dimly through the openings, then these outlines faded away, and the light of day showed through the crevices.

Leaning far out from his seat, Betty stared and stared in utter bewilderment. He could not believe the evidence of his eyes. Suddenly a shout came from the spectators, and there, bowing and smiling, stood the little old juggler, with one hand resting on the upturned bottom of the basket.

"Bedaddle!" was all Betty could say.

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"Pretty good trick, wasn't it?" came from behind him. This time he turned and saw a slim, rather pleasant-looking Japanese clad in well-made European clothes. The stranger smiled, and Betty grinned.

"Bedaddle, that was the greatest trick I ever saw!" said the latter. "How on earth did he get out of that basket without my seeing him?"

The Japanese shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't tell you, friend. It takes those jugglers years and years to learn, and they won't tell anybody how it is done. They fool us some way. I heard once it was what you call hypnotism; they cast a spell over you, and you see just what they want you to, and no more. But that isn't what I want to tell you; here's a note from your friend."

Betty stared at the paper wonderingly, not understanding at first who could have sent it to him, then he tore it open and read:

"Will be detained in the hotel until late this afternoon. I have been employed by Mr. Beaumont, who has some writing he wishes done at once. The bearer is Mr. Beaumont's valet, and he will take care of you for a while. Go with him and do just as he says; he will bring you back here before evening. Wick."

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Betty read the note a second time, then he chuckled to himself. It pleased him that Wickford had succeeded in getting a position with the Englishmen so easily, and he also felt gratified that Wickford had not told him to go to Tokyo.

"I am glad to know you," he said politely to the Japanese. "This note tells me that I am to come back here toward evening, and that until then——"

"You are to see the town with me," interrupted the other. "We will begin right away. My name is Kokoro Shira-Kumo Shiragiku Enomoto, but I am called Kokoro for short."

Betty gasped.

"Bedaddle, that beats me!" he exclaimed in apparent relief. "Say, I have at last found a name that knocks mine galley-west. Hurrah! it's too good to be true. Will you please say that again and say it slow?"

The Japanese placidly obeyed.

"If you don't mind, I'll call you Koko," said Betty at last, stifling a chuckle. "And you can call me Betty. Now, lead on to the fun."

Koko proved to be a most entertaining guide and companion. He engaged two jinrikishas, selecting coolies able to run swiftly and at great length, and took Betty for a tour of the city.

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The Settlement, the Bluff, and Japanese town were visited in turn, and "Koko" pointed out the places of interest in each division. He explained how the Settlement was devoted to the business houses of foreigners, and how they lived in comfortable picturesque dwellings on the Bluff. Then the jinrikishas were whirled out to the race course, where ugly looking Japanese ponies are raced in the spring and fall, and where gentlemen jockies ride their own mounts at other seasons.

From the high ground occupied by the race course, Betty chanced to get his first view of Fuji, the wonderful, snow-capped mountain that rears its summit more than twelve thousand feet above sea level. To the boy, who gazed in awe, it seemed as if the marvelous sides of the mountain were almost within reach of his hand instead of being many miles to the south.

After a short spin into the country, where the quaint little farmhouses with their bright-yellow thatches and painted walls seemed like so many dolls' houses, "Koko" told the coolies to take them to the hatoba, or principal landing place on the bay.

"Hayaku!" he said harshly, then explained to Betty that it was getting late, and he had a call to make before returning to the hotel.

Betty noticed with surprise that the sun was dipping

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behind the western hills. The hours they had passed in sightseeing had seemed short. Night would fall before they reached the hotel.

"Bedaddle, Wick will think I have given him the shake!" he exclaimed. "Can't we go straight back?"

Koko was sorry, but it was necessary for him to deliver a message before returning. The young gentleman need not fear, they would reach the hotel in ample time. And anyway, the young gentleman's honored friend would wait for him no matter how long.

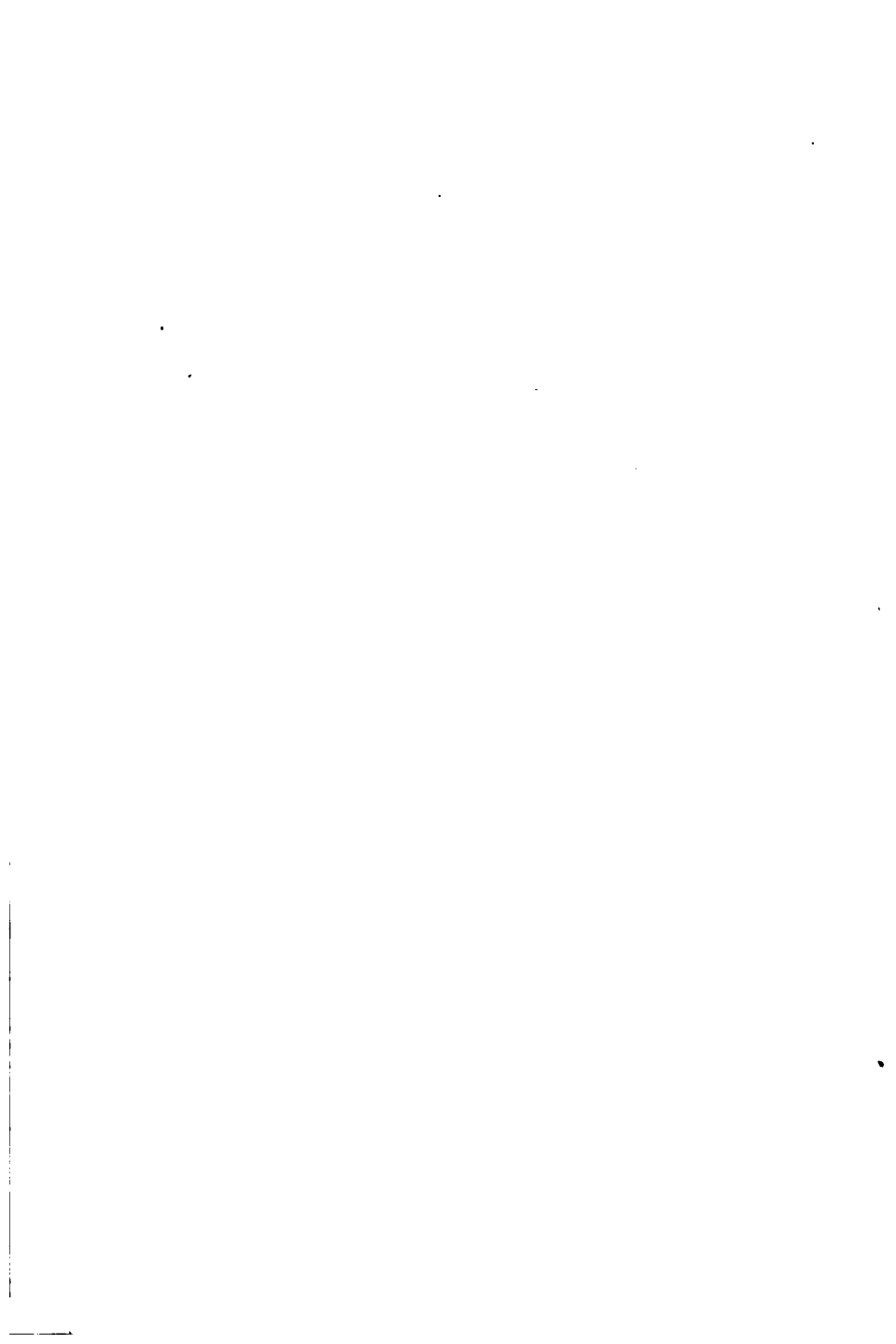
On reaching the hatoba, or landing place, Betty saw that Kobo intended to visit some vessel in port. Having made up his mind to leave matters to the Japanese, the stout boy embarked in a sampan which Koko engaged, and the two were soon being rowed, or rather paddled, out into the bay.

In the growing dusk the water scene was singularly picturesque. A number of military transports were anchored off the town, and in the distance toward Yokosuka could be seen the dim outlines of several Japanese men-of-war.

There seemed to be hundreds of small craft, steam launches, sailboats, and sampans, and occasionally the huge, unsightly bulk of a native junk intruded itself into the scene. One of the junks, anchored some distance



"A sinewy arm, naked and moist, was suddenly thrown about his throat."



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away from the main fleet, appeared to be considerably larger than the others, and Betty noticed with surprise that the sampan was approaching it.

"Is that where we're going?" he finally asked.

"Yes," replied Koko briefly. "I leave a letter on board."

Presently the boatmen, paddling steadily, brought the sampan alongside the junk. An odd-looking rope ladder hung from the waist, and as the small boat bumped against the junk's sloping side, Koko signified to Betty to ascend.

"I may be several minutes," he explained. "You might as well wait on board as here. Then you can see what a Chinese junk is like."

Nothing loath, Betty climbed to the junk's deck, immediately followed by Koko. In the semigloom the stout boy could make out only a jumbled mass of boxes and bales, a shadowy deck house forward, and a squat cabin aft. Several Chinamen, half naked and leering, watched him from the rail, and presently two men came from the cabin.

Koko presented a letter to the foremost, and spoke rapidly in Japanese for a moment. The junk's captain, for such he seemed to be, listened without comment, then turning to Betty, said in queer broken English:

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"You come in cabin, I show you first-chop curios. I got some hing-long candy, too. No get candy like hing-long in your country. You come now plenty quick."

Betty looked toward Koko. The Japanese valet smiled and nodded with his head toward the cabin.

"You see what he has in there, and I'll wait for you," he said pleasantly. "Don't be long; we've got to get back."

"I guess I won't go then," decided Betty. "Tell him I haven't time. Some other day per——"

A sinewy arm, naked and moist, was suddenly thrown about his throat, and before he could utter a sound, Betty felt himself borne to the deck. Dazed and bewildered he instinctively struck out with his hands, but they were seized roughly, and a sack smelling of tar enveloped his head.

Despite his violent struggle he was dragged unceremoniously along the deck, dumped like a bag of flour upon a hard platform, a door closed upon him, and then black darkness followed.

CHAPTER IX

WICKFORD TAKES A JOURNEY

WICKFORD accepted with thanks the invitation to take a cup of tea. Mr. Beaumont motioned him to a seat near the table, then glanced over several papers spread out before him.

"What do you think of Japan, at least that much represented by this city?" asked Mr. Girard affably.

"I like it very much, sir," replied Wick. "It is so quaint and so different. The people here are very kind and considerate, too."

Mr Beaumont looked up from his papers and smiled grimly.

"What's your name, my lad?" he asked.

"Charles Edgar, sir."

"H'm! Parents living?"

"My father is, sir."

Mr. Beaumont and Mr. Girard exchanged glances, and the latter passed one hand over his mouth as if hid-

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ing a yawn. It was a smile, however. Scribbling a line on the back of an envelope he laid it before Mr. Beaumont.

"By the way, here is that address you asked me for this morning," he said.

What the other read, however, was entirely different. The line said:

"Don't ask too many questions. We must not scare him off."

"Aw, thanks," said Mr. Beaumont languidly. Then he added to Wickford, pushing back his chair and beaming good-naturedly:

"Now, my lad, we'll talk about that position I mentioned this morning. I happen to need an assistant to my secretary, and if your penmanship is good enough I think I will give you a chance. You seem to be a bright lad, one who knows enough to be discreet. Just take this bit of paper and write as I dictate."

If Wick had glanced up as he bent to his task, he might have seen Mr. Beaumont exchange a solemn wink with Mr. Girard. His entire attention was given to the test of penmanship, however. The possibility of securing such an opportunity to keep watch over the two plotters was almost too good to be true.

"Write your name in full," directed Mr. Beaumont,

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"then add this sentence: 'His Majesty the Emperor of Japan and His Majesty the King of England, Emperor of India and Defender of the Faith, being equally desirous of maintaining the relations of good understanding which happily exists between them, by extending and increasing the intercourse between their respective states, and being convinced that this object cannot better be accomplished than by—' That will do."

Mr. Beaumont took the paper, adjusted his monocle, and scanned the words.

"Egad! that's fine," he exclaimed. "You write well, my lad. A good, clerkly hand that will please their excellencies of the Foreign Office. Consider yourself engaged as an assistant. The monthly stipend will be eight pounds and expenses beginning to-day. Now, Girard?"

"I am sure Charles will be of assistance to us," drawled the other. "We need some one to copy those reports on the treaty. As I am going to His Excellency, Prince Tsuda's country residence to-night, I will take Charles, and he can begin his copying work there."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Beaumont.

"What clothes have you?" asked Mr. Girard.

Wickford glanced down at his wrinkled linen suit and smiled.

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"What I stand in, sir. I have some money, and I'll buy whatever is necessary. I'll go out now and get it."

Wickford rose from his chair, but Mr. Beaumont hastily motioned him to stop.

"Mr. Girard will get you an outfit," he said hurriedly. "You—that is, I have some very important copying for you. The mail leaves to-night and there are dispatches and—just take that table near the window. Here are pen and paper, and this document."

He gave Wickford a bundle of notes and fairly shoved him toward the table indicated.

"I would like to see a friend of mine who is waiting for me," expostulated Wick. "It is that stout boy who jumped from the train, you know. I told him I would see him before doing anything."

Mr. Beaumont screwed his eyeglass into its socket as if irritated.

"Well, sir, if you do not care to do as you are told, I am afraid our agreement will have to end," he said stiffly.

Wickford's face fell.

"I will obey you, sir," he replied eagerly. "But can't I see Betty or send word to him?"

"I'll see him for you," volunteered Mr. Girard. "I

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know him. He's that fat youth with the round face and the queer name. What do you want to tell him?"

The question was nonplussing. Wickford did not know what to say. It was obvious Betty could not accompany him, and the present situation was entirely too promising to suffer neglect. Betty had begged not to be sent to Tokyo, yet that was the only solution.

"I'll write a note if you will be kind enough to give it to him," he said to Mr. Girard. "You will find Betty sitting in a jinrikisha outside the main entrance."

He scribbled a line telling the stout boy to go at once to Tokyo and to tell Larry to look out for him until further word was received, then with characteristic generosity he slipped two of the golden sovereigns into the envelope and gave it to Mr. Girard.

It was fully two hours before the latter returned, accompanied by a porter carrying a bundle. He seemed fatigued and worried.

"Here are some things you will need in the country," he said. "There are a few shirts, some collars, a necktie, and other articles. You will also find a linen suit which I think will fit you."

"You are very good," exclaimed Wick gratefully. He added: "And Betty?"

Mr. Girard gave Mr. Beaumont a fleeting glance.

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"Oh, he is all right now," he replied evasively. "He read your note and then asked the way to the railway station. I told his jinrikisha man to deliver him safe and sound."

The papers occupied Wick during the rest of the afternoon. They were state documents of little interest, and the lad felt relieved when darkness fell upon the spacious apartment. Dinner was served at seven, then Mr. Beaumont packed his bag and departed for Tokyo, as he announced.

"I'll see you a little later," he told Wick. "Go with Mr. Girard and do as he tells you. We work together, and any orders given by him are authoritative."

It was after midnight when Mr. Girard prepared to leave the hotel. During the evening he had kept Wick steadily at work, and seemed silent and preoccupied. The jinrikisha ride to the railway station through the town did not interest the lad very much. There was a great deal of bustle, and under other conditions the picturesque scene would have appealed to him, but the thought that he had at last fairly embarked in his attempt to solve the plot undoubtedly concocted by the two Englishmen against his father kept him engrossed.

Mr. Girard secured an empty compartment in the train, and immediately buried himself in a traveling rug.

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Wickford remained awake and alert for some time, but finally a heavy drowsiness overpowered him.

It was morning and the dawn was breaking when the train, with many jolts and the sullen grinding of wheels, came to a stop at a little station which seemed deserted save for a sleepy agent and a porter or two.

"The first half of our trip is over, Charles," said Mr. Girard almost jovially. "Now, after a bit of provender in yonder inn, we'll set out for the prince's place. It will be a long ride over a very rough path, but the day is young, and so are we. Come, my lad, to eat is to gain strength, and to gain strength is to offer a battle royal to the spears of adversity. I learned that at Rugby. Ever been there?"

Wickford shook his head and smiled.

"Not within many miles of it, sir," he replied respectfully. He was pleased to see that his traveling companion could joke occasionally.

After a liberal breakfast of rice, raw eggs, and a dish of bean broth, Mr. Girard secured a guide and the journey was resumed. Wick noticed with surprise that, instead of the jinrikishas he had expected, there were two extremely queer-looking vehicles, something totally unlike any class of vehicle he had ever seen before.

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"It is what they call a kago," explained Mr. Girard, noting Wick's surprise. "They looked deuced uncomfortable, and they are. It is the only thing suitable to mountain roads, at least in Japan."

The kago proved to be a shallow basket with a high back, suspended from a pole carried on the shoulders of two men. Wick, despite his agility, found it necessary to accept the help of a coolie in maintaining his balance when the two bearers lifted the odd contrivance. He also realized very soon that the crouching position upon the knees which it was necessary to assume was not at all comfortable.

Mr. Girard seemed to experience similar discomfort, but he made no comment. At a word from the guide the bearers set off at a long swinging trot.

The little village was astir as the calvacade departed, and many curious glances were cast at the foreigners who were intrepid enough and foolish enough to take a kago journey at that hour. The village once left, the road led upward through a dense forest of stunted trees until finally a clearing covering a small shelf on the mountainside invited a halt and a rest.

The coolie bearers, little men with shy eyes and apathetic faces, threw themselves upon the ground panting like so many cattle. Wickford and Mr. Girard, cramped

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and exhausted, could hardly drag themselves from the stiff seats.

"Egad! it is worse than I thought," groaned the Englishman. "My legs are dead below the knee."

"Mr. Girard," said Wick, stretching himself, "does his Highness, the Prince, travel this way every time he visits his country estate?"

Mr. Girard shot a glance at the boy, but there was nothing in Wick's attitude to indicate anything in the question beyond mere curiosity.

"H'm! I suppose he must," was the dry reply, "unless he owns an air-ship. Do you see that cloud toward the south?"

Wickford looked in the direction indicated. A vapory mass hung suspended above the valley they had just left, and as the boy watched he saw it rent by a strong wind, leaving a great stretch of mountain which finally assumed stupendous proportions. The mighty peak rose sheer from the lowlands, forming a majestic cone of indescribable beauty. Toward the bottom the giant slopes were green, but the hue changed to brown above, and then dazzling streaks of white; finally at the summit a silvery cap which sparkled in the sun's ardent rays.

"That's beautiful," murmured Wick.

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"It is Fuji-san, the mountain of mountains," said Mr. Girard. "It is worshiped as a goddess by the Japs, you know. Pilgrims ascend to the top every year, thousands of them. There are Shinto temples and rest houses all the way up, and all that. Queer belief they have about Fuji-san. The ignorant natives say that it was made in a single night two thousands years ago; that the goddess hated her sex and kept a lot of blooming devils to fly away with any woman who climbed the mountain. Up to a year or so ago, you couldn't get a woman within a mile of the mountain. Precious rot, isn't it?"

The cloud shifted again, hiding the marvelous panorama as if with an opaque curtain. A damp, chilly air came from the valley. The guide summoned the coolie bearers, and Wick and Mr. Girard reluctantly took their places in the uncomfortable baskets.

"The next lift is worse," said Mr. Girard. "I advise you to hold tight or you may get a bad spill."

Within a mile the path narrowed until it was difficult to carry the kagos without scraping their sides. The ground sloped upward at a stiff angle, and loose rocks gave uncertain welcome to the poorly shod feet of the bearers.

Finally a bend in the path revealed a narrow shelflike stretch, and the cavalcade halted. The path itself was

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not more than three or four feet in width, and the edge overlooked a sheer declivity of hundreds of yards. To add to the peril, a rain or heavy mist during the night had made the ground slippery.

"We'll have to dismount here and walk," called out Mr. Girard.

The kagos were placed upon the ground and after Wick and the Englishman had crawled from them the coolie bearers cautiously led the way across the slippery path.

Mr. Girard went first, followed by the Japanese guide, then came Wick. All went well until two thirds of the distance had been covered. Thinking himself safe, Mr. Girard glanced back and waved his hand. At the same moment he stepped upon a broken twig, his foot slipped and he fell, rolling over to the very edge of the cliff.

"Look out!" cried Wick in horror.

A smothered shout of fear came from the prostrate man, then, just as he reached the edge, the Japanese guide and Wick sprang to his assistance. What followed was not clear until long after.

Wick knew that the Japanese managed to clutch Mr. Girard by the right leg, and that to save himself from being dragged over the edge, the guide swung back

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and caught at Wick's extended hand, but how he managed to withstand the shock, the lad never quite understood.

There was a confused struggle, a final desperate effort to work back from the brink of the precipice, then, panting and exhausted, the two men and the lad found themselves prone upon the ground, covered with grimy earth, but safe.

Wick was the first to regain his feet. As he stood up he caught sight of a leather bill-case lying upon the ground almost at his feet. The clasp had opened and a folded paper had fluttered from the case.

Instinctively the lad stooped and picked up both case and paper. And hardly knowing what he did, he hastily thrust the paper into his blouse.

CHAPTER X

WICK LEARNS THE TRUTH

THE Englishman was considerably shaken by his narrow escape, and several minutes elapsed before he felt inclined to continue the journey.

"Ugh! that was a close call," he said, glancing back at the treacherous path. "I have been near death several times in my life, but never so close to it as that."

Then, with characteristic impatience and vexation, he berated the coolie bearers, who accepted the scolding with the stolidity of their race. The guide also viewed the incident without comment. As a fatalist he saw nothing surprising in the outcome of the episode.

Wick took an early occasion to give the wallet to Mr. Girard, simply explaining that he had picked it up during the excitement. The Englishman muttered his thanks and thrust the book into his coat pocket without examining the contents, to Wickford's great relief.

After an hour's steady climbing, during which a con-

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siderable altitude was reached, the summit of the elevation came in view. A brief rest was taken, then the little party began the descent. The way led through a dense forest for several miles, then the growth became thinner, and finally a cleared space offered a view of a beautiful lake which seemed set like a stupendous emerald in the hollow of the mountains.

"Do you see that island toward the other end, the one with rocky shores and thick woods?" asked Mr. Girard, pointing with his cane. "That's our destination."

"The prince has a charming place," commented Wick, "even if it is difficult to reach it."

"Yes, it's a charming country seat, is the prince's," agreed Mr. Girard dryly.

Ten minutes later the level valley was reached, the path broadening into a road which seemed to skirt the shore of the lake.

It was now almost noon and Wick felt considerably relieved when the party finally halted at a little landing which seemed to have been recently repaired. There were few signs of habitation. In fact, that part of the lake was wild and its shores uncultivated. The mountain rose in a steep slant a short distance from the water's edge, and the only indication of life was the grotesquely

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decorated roof of a Japanese structure showing above the tops of a stunted grove on the island.

There was a stretch of probably a thousand yards between the main shore and this island, and shortly after the kago bearers set down their burden, the guide hailed the island. Presently a man was seen to shove off a boat and paddle toward them.

Mr. Girard met the oarsman at the edge of the stone landing and talked with him for several minutes, then he beckoned to Wick.

"This is Mr. Utamaro," he said formally. "He tells me the prince was called away early this morning to Kyoto. I am sorry, as it means that I must return to Yokohama at once. The prince will be back to-morrow morning, and I'll try to get here at the same time. Until then you can stay with Mr. Utamaro. He will take good care of you, won't you, Utamaro?"

The Japanese was not of the common class, Wick saw at a glance. He stood almost six feet in height, unusual for his race; his frame was big and his body muscular, and his face revealed a strong degree of intelligence. He smiled as the Englishman ceased speaking, but there was something furtive in the expression.

"I am glad to meet you," he said to Wick in excellent English. "I have known Mr. Beaumont for sev-

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eral years. Any friend of his owns my house and my services. Mr. Girard, you can be sure I will take excellent care of this young man—excellent care.”

For some reason he could not understand, Wick felt uneasy. The surroundings were so strange, Utamaro's voice and general bearing unattractive, and the departure so entirely unexpected that, for the moment, the lad was almost tempted to refuse.

The thought that he had no reasonable excuse to offer made him accept the situation, however, and he said with as much warmth as he could command:

“I am sorry you have to take that ride again, Mr. Girard, and especially without resting. I will stay here until you return. Anything I can do in the meantime?”

Mr. Girard shook his head.

“I guess Mr. Utamaro will keep you busy looking around the place,” he replied grimly. “Well, sayonaro, at least until to-morrow.”

Climbing into one of the waiting kagos, he waved his hand and was carried from sight down the road. Wick turned to see the stalwart Japanese regarding him with a quizzical smile.

“Lonesome already, eh?”

There was a sneer in the man's tone that Wick did not like.

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"No, I am not lonesome, at least not yet," he replied courteously enough. "It is rather strange for me, of course, but I think I will be glad to see the prince's place, and that will pass the time until Mr. Girard returns."

"You will pass the time all right seeing—the prince's place," replied Utamaro with something very like a laugh. "Enter the boat, sir."

Wick was puzzled. During the short trip to the island he remained buried in thought. Try as he would, he could not shake off the feeling that all was not right. Mr. Girard's actions were commonplace enough, and even Utamaro had not said or done anything to arouse his suspicions, but there was an indefinable belief in the lad's mind that it would pay him to be wary.

Utamaro remained silent until the boat reached a wooden wharf jutting out from the island, then as he motioned Wick to disembark, he said:

"Don't expect to see a grand palace like those in your country. We are modest people here in Japan. We don't put our wealth into stone and brick and crystal, but into guns and ships. That is why we are whipping the Russian dogs, and why we whipped the Chinese, and it is also why we will some day show you boasting Americans what fighting means."

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Wick looked at the speaker in amazement. The threat in the words and the insulting tone sent the blood to his face. Before he could retort, however, Utamaro forced a laugh.

"Ha! ha! I thought you would look at me," he said. "I didn't mean anything. I just wanted to see if you were English or American. That's all right, my boy. No harm done."

"It doesn't make much difference what I am," retorted Wick steadily. "Now that you have mentioned it, I am willing to say that we admire your countrymen for their bravery and fighting abilities, but if we were the enemy I guess there would be another tale to tell."

Utamaro fastened the boat and led the way along a narrow road in silence. Wick saw with some surprise and increasing uneasiness that the island showed little signs of care or cultivation. The undergrowth was dense and rank, and there were few signs indicating that this was the country estate of a prince.

"His Excellency may like this kind of thing," murmured the boy, "but I declare I can't appreciate his taste. It seems to me that something is wrong; there's a black man in the woodpile, as Betty would say."

After walking a few hundred yards, a clearing was reached. In the center of this open space was a low and

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rambling house constructed after the typical Japanese style with fragile wooden sides, a sloping roof, and the usual sliding screen doors.

The place seemed deserted, but smoke issuing from a brazier, or outdoor cooking stove, indicated that some one had been preparing a meal. Something in the appearance of the house and the unkempt, overgrown surroundings struck Wick as gravely significant.

"See here, Mr. Utamaro," he exclaimed impulsively, "I beg your pardon, but is this the country estate of your prince?"

The Japanese nodded.

"It is, my dear young friend," he replied ironically. "Aren't you satisfied with the prospects? Isn't this palatial edifice good enough for you? I am sure his Highness would feel very unhappy if he thought his honored guest"—here Utamaro made a sweeping bow—"was not pleased with the hospitality extended to him. If you will deign to put up with our poor quarters for the day I will try to persuade his Majesty, the Emperor, to give you shelter in his palace."

Before Wick could reply to this astounding speech, a distant shout came from the direction of the landing. Standing close to the water's edge was Mr. Girard frantically waving his arms and calling.

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"What does he want now?" exclaimed the Japanese.
"He must have forgotten something."

He hesitated, then added authoritatively:

"Remain here until I come back, sir."

Without waiting for a reply, he ran to the landing and was soon paddling vigorously after Mr. Girard. Wick stood for a moment in doubt, then he walked slowly toward the house.

"I wonder what Mr. Girard is after," he murmured.
"He certainly seems excited. I wonder——"

He stopped, then with a sudden movement whipped from his blouse the paper he had concealed there several hours before. From where he stood the house was not visible, a clump of dwarf trees obstructing the view.

"I'll bet a round dollar he's after this document," the boy murmured. "If he finds it on me, the whole affair will come to an end. I must hide the paper somewhere else, and at once."

Wick glanced hurriedly about him. He caught sight of an old stone urn lying upon its side, as if thrown there by one of the numerous earthquakes visiting Japan. Moss and entwining creepers indicated that it had not been disturbed for years.

Hastily scraping away the mold under one corner of the urn, Wick thrust in the paper, then turned in the

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direction of the landing. Utamaro had just reached the opposite shore. As Wick watched, Mr. Girard entered the boat and apparently urged the Japanese to hasten to the island. A few minutes later they came up to where Wick quietly awaited them.

Mr. Girard's face was red, and he breathed as if in a rage. Without heeding Wick's greeting, he shouted:

"Look here, confound you, I want that paper!"

Wick's face was absolutely perfect in its expression of surprise.

"Paper, sir?" he echoed. "What paper do you mean?"

"You know very well," retorted the Englishman roughly. "When I had that tumble on the path and you picked up my wallet, you found a paper. Give it to me at once, or I'll——"

He advanced menacingly with uplifted hand, but at a low-spoken word from Utamaro, who had quickly stepped between, lowered his arm. Wick bit his lips to keep back the retort he was about to utter. He resented the man's abusive words and attitude, but he realized that it would not do to spoil the game at this most interesting juncture.

"Mr. Girard, I haven't any such paper about me," he said earnestly. "I can see that it must be some-

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thing of importance. If you do not believe me, I'll be glad to let you search me and also my bag."

This statement, instead of placating Mr. Girard, seemed to inflame him all the more. Thrusting Utamaro aside, he said harshly:

"You lie, and you know it, you Yankee whelp! This humbug has gone far enough. I know who you are, and so does Beaumont. You are Wickford Ralston, son of the American Minister to Japan. You think you have hoodwinked us. Bah! are we babies to let a boy like you fool us? We found you out yesterday, and we've brought you here for safe keeping until your tongue will not harm us. Utamaro will see that you are kept out of the way on this island as secretly as if you were at the bottom of the ocean. Now, I want that paper or I'll give you the worst beating you ever had in your whole life."

The totally unexpected words caused Wick to stare at the speaker in open-mouthed amazement. His heart sank as he realized that his masquerading had utterly failed. Before he could do more than lift one arm in front of his face, Mr. Girard sprang upon him.

CHAPTER XI

THE FACE IN THE WINDOW

WICKFORD'S athletic training and life in the open air had given him a good foundation of strength, but he was no match for Mr. Girard. The man was as lean and sinewy as a well-trained wrestler. Before Utamaro could interfere he bore Wick to the ground and held him there despite the lad's struggles.

"Now will you give me that paper?" he demanded fiercely.

"I told you I didn't have it," gasped Wick. "Let me up, will you? You must be crazy. Let me up, I say."

Humiliated, discouraged, and consumed by a furious anger at thus being handled like a child, Wick made one supreme effort and finally managed to break Mr. Girard's grasp. Wriggling to one side, he regained his feet and stood panting and half-crying before his enemy.

The tears were natural: they did not flow from fear

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or pain, but because at that moment Wick felt a greater loss of his pride and self-respect than he could describe.

Utamaro, who for some reason seemed intent on preventing violence, took an active part in the affair at this juncture. Again stepping between Mr. Girard and Wick, he said something in a low tone to the former. Wick caught only an occasional word, but he knew that Utamaro was endeavoring to calm the enraged man.

"All right, have it your own way," Mr. Girard finally said. "And mark you, Utamaro, we hold you personally responsible for the young whelp. Beaumont wishes me to impress upon you the absolute necessity of keeping the boy where he can neither escape nor communicate with his father."

"How long will it be, sir?" asked the Japanese.

Wick pricked up his ears, but the two men talked together in such low tones that he could hear nothing.

"Mr. Girard," Wick interrupted at last, "Mr. Girard, will you permit me to say a word or two?"

The man turned upon him with a snarl.

"I don't care what you say," he replied contemptuously. "You are out of the race now, my boy."

"I suppose you are right, sir, if there is a race. I fail to see one, however. I want to say that this is the most extraordinary thing I ever knew. I confess I am

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the son of the American Minister to this country, and I also confess that I have been trying to discover just what you are plotting against my father. You have caught me, but do you think for a moment that you can keep me a prisoner on this island? This is not the Middle Ages, neither is it a penny theater."

"Can't keep you, eh?" echoed Mr. Girard with an unpleasant laugh. "You'll find out."

Wick eyed him for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said finally, "there will be a reckoning. You will find that my father will have something to say later on. He is the American Minister to this country, and he represents the President of the United States. I may be only a boy, but perhaps I will repay you for this before we are through."

"That sounds very fine and nice," sneered Mr. Girard. "But don't forget that we are not through with you."

Wick did not attempt to argue further. He felt that he was powerless against his two enemies, for such they were proving to be, and he resolved to keep silent and await his time. He submitted without protest when Mr. Girard searched him for the missing paper.

"Well, it will not help you anyway," decided the

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former, finally desisting. "I suppose you have thrown it away or hidden it somewhere. I don't care now."

As Mr. Girard prepared to leave, Wick asked him a question which had been in his thoughts for some minutes.

"Will you mind telling me what became of Betty?"

"Not at all," readily replied Mr. Girard. "Your fat friend is on his way to China about this time. He'll be taken care of in a way that won't cause you or us any trouble; in fact, he is off the map."

He bowed ironically, then, after a few words with Utamaro, entered the boat and paddled toward the other shore. Wick saw him reach the landing where the kago carriers were waiting, then disappear up the path.

Presently Utamaro broke the silence.

"Now, my young friend, we will have an understanding," said the Japanese in a matter-of-fact tone. "There is little use of your fuming and fretting. I don't blame you for being angry and frightened, but——"

Wick interrupted him with a gesture.

"Don't say that," he objected proudly. "I am not frightened. I confess to being mad—I am mad clear through, and I'm going to get square with those Englishmen if it takes a leg. As for you, Mr. Utamaro, I don't believe you quite know what all this means. Surely

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you understand that my Government will have somebody punished for this preposterous affair. I am only a boy, but I know that diplomatic ministers are the same as the government they represent. Governments demand satisfaction when an ordinary citizen is injured; how much more will they demand it when a member of a representative's family is treated as I am being treated."

Utamaro smiled in a sarcastic manner, but Wick continued.

"My father told me of a case that happened in Guatemala a number of years ago," he added earnestly. "A man named John McGee was the British consular agent in the port of San Jose, and the captain of the port got mad one day and ordered McGee lashed. The consular agent was tied to a post and given fifty lashes, and he would have been killed if some officials from the interior had not stopped it. The British Government asked McGee if he wanted the captain of the port lashed fifty times or if he wanted the Government of Guatemala to pay him a thousand dollars for each lash. McGee took the fifty thousand dollars, and the British fleet went to San Jose to see that the money was paid."

"An entertaining story," yawned Utamaro, "but it doesn't interest me just at present. What I want to know while we are walking to the house is, will you

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promise not to run away if I let you walk around, or shall I lock you up?"

Wick's answer was ready.

"I'll not promise anything except that you will be punished before we get through with this affair," he said promptly. "You can lock me up if you wish to."

"All right. I'll see that you are attended to," replied the Japanese, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I am sorry that your attitude compels me to resort to extreme measures. I fain would have treated you as an honored and revered guest. Alas! we cannot always do as our natural inclinations would have us do."

He motioned Wick to precede him across the clearing, which, on closer inspection, gave indication of a long-abandoned garden. Beyond the simple house in the center of the open space could now be seen the shattered and verdure-covered walls of an ancient castle. The broken ramparts rose not more than eighteen or twenty feet above the ground, but the foundation was of immense thickness, showing that the castle had been an imposing structure before its destruction.

The island itself was not of great extent, and Wick could see the glimmer of water through the trees on the left. To the rear of the ruin, however, appeared a space exceeding fifteen or twenty acres. The dense

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undergrowth and clumps of dwarf trees almost covered the island, but here and there were indications of paths leading toward the water's edge. Wick observed all this, then he turned to Utamaro and said abruptly:

"Mr. Utamaro, I am only sixteen, but my father has trusted me with a good deal of money. He wanted to give me a practical lesson in saving and in handling money, so he placed one thousand dollars in a bank at home in my name. I am responsible for it, but I can draw it out without even consulting him. Now, if you will let me go from this island, I'll promise to——"

"Stop!"

The Japanese raised his arm menacingly.

"Stop, I say!" he repeated. "How dare you insult me like that! If you were not in my charge, I would beat the breath from your body. What do you think I am, a dog or a Russian, that you can offer me a bribe?"

The man's face was convulsed with rage, and he seemed on the point of aiming a blow at Wick. The latter did not give way. In fact, he was so astonished that he simply stood and stared. Such a fervent declaration of honesty and probity from one at that moment engaged in a most reprehensible act, an act closely connected with kidnaping, was amazing, to say the least.

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Wick was quick-witted enough, however, to realize that he had a most extraordinary man to deal with, and he made up his mind to be very wary in his speech and actions.

"Very well, Mr. Utamaro," he said meekly, "I beg your pardon. I am sorry if my words offended you."

The Japanese actually smiled, and the expression upon his face altered as if by magic.

"That is all right, my son," he replied mildly. "No harm done. Some day, when you have known us long enough, you will understand our character. The sons of Nippon revere honesty and truthfulness above everything."

"They certainly have a queer way of showing it; at least some of those I have met," said Wick to himself.

The subject was suddenly dismissed from his mind by a most peculiar sound which seemed to come from behind a sliding window at the right of the main doorway, which they had now reached, and as Wick glanced hastily in that direction he saw a grotesque face, almost horrible in its ugliness, appear in the opening.

Utamaro called out imperiously, and the thing vanished with a shrill cry, but not before Wick had noticed with a shudder that the creature's eyes, green and sparkling, had given him a menacing glance.

CHAPTER XII

A FIGHT AND ITS SURPRISING RESULT

IT was in a much perturbed frame of mind that Wick at last found himself a prisoner in a small interior room in the Japanese cottage. The appearance of the grotesque, half-human creature at the window of the house came as the last straw, and for one moment the lad almost gave way to tears.

It was not from fright, but as a culmination of the whole series of startling incidents. So much had happened in the past forty-eight hours, so much that was totally foreign to the ordinary life of an American lad, that Wick can be pardoned for a feeling of utter discouragement.

"I have been entirely too confident," muttered the lad miserably, as he paced back and forth within the narrow confines of his prison. "Like a fool, I thought that I knew it all. Oh, I was going to do everything! A kid of two years would have had more sense. Why didn't I go straight to father and tell him the whole

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story? No, I am Wickford Ralston, the son of the Minister to Japan, and the great know-it-all of the age."

Finally, worn out by his emotions and loss of sleep, Wick glanced about for some place to rest. The room was absolutely barren of furniture, however. The floor was covered with matting, with here and there a padded comforter or a Japanese sleeping block, but of chairs, table, or couch there was none.

At last the boy threw himself upon the floor and rested his head on the peculiar sleeping block, used almost exclusively in Japan in lieu of a pillow. Presently he slept, but only fitfully. Strange and disturbing dreams came to him, and in all of them the grotesque thing he had seen at the window figured as the principal.

Suddenly he awoke with a start. There was a scratching noise at the door and, as Wick scrambled to his feet, it was opened slightly and a tray thrust inside. Wick laughed with relief. It was his tiffin, or lunch.

"I must say that I would rather see it than that horrible thing," he murmured, his spirits returning with the lightheartedness of youth. "And I confess that I am hungry enough to eat a whale."

He gave a good account of the rice and pickled fish, and wiped his mouth in huge satisfaction.

A FIGHT AND ITS SURPRISING RESULT

After a time, feeling restless, he began a minute investigation of the room. The result rather surprised him. Instead of the lath and plaster common in America, these partitions were made of thin wood of the most flimsy construction. It seemed quite possible to poke one's finger through the wall at almost any point.

"It is evident they don't rely upon the partition to keep me a prisoner," reflected the lad. "There must be something else."

He fell to thinking. Utamaro himself was a veritable giant among Japanese, and Wickford realized that he would prove no match for him in a rough-and-tumble struggle. Then there was the monstrous apparition he had seen. Beast or human being, it was sufficiently terrifying to afford a most effective barrier against escape.

There did not appear to be any other person in or about the cottage, but Wick acknowledged ruefully that additional guards were not needed.

"I am willing to face even Utamaro or Mr. Girard, but I draw the line at that creature."

The afternoon dragged slowly. Several times the lad thumped upon the frail door or called out, but the only response he received was a sharp command from Utamaro to be silent. As the approach of night brought

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a shadow to the room, Utamaro appeared with the evening meal.

He seemed in rare good spirits and greeted Wick in the most friendly manner.

"I trust you have rested well," he said. "I looked in several times and found you sleeping as peacefully as if there was not a care or worry in your whole life. Will you oblige your servant by partaking of this frugal repast?"

"I'll eat something, if you don't mind," replied Wick bluntly. "And I hope you won't object to my saying that I'd give everything I own if the meal was being served to me in the American Legation at Tokyo."

Utamaro spread out his hands with an expressive gesture.

"That will come before long, my son," he said. "A few days, or a week, and you will again be with your honored parent. He will welcome you as one from the dead."

"He will probably want to give me a good hiding," said Wick ruefully. "I should deserve it for being such a double-twisted idiot. If I had acted sensibly I shouldn't be here now."

"Ah! and I should not have had the pleasure of your company as my guest," insisted Utamaro so courteously that Wick regarded him with more friendliness.

A FIGHT AND ITS SURPRISING RESULT

His rest and the effect of a fairly good dinner caused the lad to feel more sanguine, and he again looked upon the situation as one offering an agreeable variety of adventure. He even felt some curiosity concerning his companion.

"Mr. Utamaro," he began, cleaning up the last crumb of sweet cake on his tray, "would you mind telling me how you can be honest and truthful and at the same time help a pair of precious scoundrels like those Englishmen kidnap me and hold me a prisoner?"

"It may seem strange to you with your Western ideas," replied Utamaro, puffing comfortably at a pipe, "but I suppose it is because you Americans have no acquaintance with Bushido."

"Never heard of him."

Utamaro squatted upon the mat and smoked reflectively for a while, then he continued:

"Bushido is not a 'him'; it's an inspiration. It is a code of honor practiced by my countrymen during the past six centuries or more. It is the spirit that inspires us on the battle field, in our domestic affairs, in business, and in the service of the Emperor."

"Gee! it must be a wonder," exclaimed Wick, amused.

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"You have heard of the old samurai?"

"They were the soldiers——"

"Not altogether," interrupted Utamaro dreamily.

"They were like the English knights of ancient times, whose services were wholly given to their lord. In old Japan the profession of arms was the most honorable of all professions. The scale of rank, descending, ranged from the Emperor and court nobles to the daimyo, who were the same as monarchs or rulers in their own territory; then came the samurai, their retainers, then the agriculturists and tradesmen. The samurai were absolutely loyal to their lords; they had indomitable strength and courage, magnanimity, perfect self-possession, and the willingness and skill to commit hara-kiri."

"That was killing one's self by falling upon a sword?"

"Yes—the most honorable of deaths."

"We call it suicide at home," said Wick quietly, "and the police lock you up if you try it."

The expression of disgust and pitying contempt on Utamaro's face was intense.

"Barbarians!" he ejaculated. "Humph! it is the same in England. There is no truth, no honesty, no courage anywhere but in Japan."

Wick laughed.

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"That's putting it rather strong," he said, "but let it go for the present. You Japanese feel cocky because you have whipped the Russians, but there are other nations. Some day, perhaps, you'll pick a quarrel with the wrong dog."

"When we do we will know how to stand defeat as well as we know how to take our victories," replied Utamaro proudly. "You have been in Japan long enough to see that we are not carried away by our success. Have we gone crazy, as the English did in London when their generals won a fight with the poor Boers? It is less than a week since Admiral Togo swept Rojestvensky's fleet from the sea, destroying twenty-one ships and capturing five, yet we are not beating the drums of victory. Now, my son, if we can be so calm in triumph, rest assured we shall not wail and beat our breasts when we suffer defeat. Would you like to know how we control ourselves?"

Wick nodded politely.

"The influence of Bushido, my son. The underlying principle of Bushido is duty; duty to one's emperor, one's parent, one's friend, one's own honor. Bushido helps the son of Nippon to control his emotions, to calm his passions, to bear his sorrows, and to live an honorable life. Bushido compels me to help Mr. Beau-

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mont, because I owe a debt of gratitude to him. At one time, while an attaché-interpreter at our Legation in London, a serious trouble befell me, and he assisted me and saved my honor. In return I am bound in honor to do his bidding."

"But what about the punishment you are going to get when I see my father again?" asked Wick steadily. "Mr. Beaumont will not be able to help you. In fact, he may be in trouble himself."

Utamaro shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"We have a proverb in Japanese which means that only the silly taste their rice before they place it in their mouths. I have a duty to perform, and I care not for the consequences. You may think it strange that I am content to break the law in repayment of an honorable obligation; it is Bushido. Let me tell you a story."

Utamaro refilled his English pipe and lighted it, then settled back against the wall. By this time the room was almost dark, only a faint, dim light showing through the half-open door from the outer apartment. The silence was unbroken save by the quick puffing of the Japanese, and the faint chirping of a night bird in the near-by forest.

Wick noticed with a start that Utamaro had chosen a spot away from the door. His heart beat with sudden

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hope. If he could manage to gain the open by a quick dash, perhaps he could escape in the growing darkness and swim to the mainland.

It was with ill-concealed eagerness that he watched Utamaro begin his tale. Was it possible that an opportunity to get away from the clutches of the English plotters had at last come to him?

"When I was a little boy, not more than six years old," began Utamaro reminiscently, "I lived in a small fishing village on the Inland Sea. My father had an official position in the town, and I went to school to an old man who had been a member of the samurai in his youth. He was a fine man and showed us how to kill our enemies with his big sword, and he told us beautiful tales of his adventures when he did nothing but fight the battles of his lord all day long. He had a brother who was not as good as he, and this brother fell into evil ways, and finally became a robber. Well, it came to pass that Tejeto—my friend and teacher—was called upon to capture and kill this robber, who was not known as Tejeto's brother. It was a pretty complication."

Utamaro paused and relighted his pipe. Bit by bit Wick had edged toward the door until now he was in a position to make the contemplated dash for freedom. He knew that only one room separated him from the

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open air, and he saw that both doors were open. There would be no difficulty in gaining the outside, if he did not meet the horrible creature of the window.

"It was a pretty complication," droned Utamaro between puffs. "You see, Bushido compelled Tejeto to do his duty both by his brother and by his lord who had ordered him to dispatch the robber. Well, Tejeto, filled with sorrow, went to a noted shrine in the mountains, there to pray and to ask advice. He worshiped all one day and far into the night, and then, when he started to leave the shrine, he encountered on the very threshold his recreant brother, who was visiting the place in disguise. Tejeto recognized him at once. He had loved this brother, and as he saw him the fraternal feeling came back with redoubled strength. At the same time there called to the unhappy man the voice of duty to his lord. Tejeto stood at the door of the shrine and——"

The droning voice ended abruptly. There was a crash as Wick hurled himself past the half-open door; a shrill cry came from Utamaro's lips, and as the Japanese bounded after the fugitive an answering shout sounded outside.

The next moment Wick rushed violently through the intervening room, and with a long leap gained the open

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air. It was still light enough for him to discern the road leading to the landing, and also a path entering the woods a few rods away. He turned toward the latter with the desperate hope that he could conceal himself.

As he dashed toward the path a boy, slender and not quite so tall as he, rose up apparently from the ground directly in front. Wick compressed his lips and, without a word, sprang upon the lad. There was a very brief struggle, then, to his overwhelming amazement, Wick felt himself hurled backward as if from a catapult. A sharp pain shot through his shoulders, and then came blackness and oblivion.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE ANCIENT CASTLE

THE first evidence of returning consciousness came to Wick in the shape of an animated conversation. The words formed a complete jumble at first, then he heard his name mentioned. Cautiously opening his eyes, he saw that he was still in the open air, apparently where he had fallen. Utamaro and the strange lad stood close by, talking in Japanese. The next impression gained by Wick was that his head seemed wet, as if it had been bathed in water. A peculiar aromatic odor was apparent.

Then Wick sat upright with a groan.

"Ah, my son, you are recovering," exclaimed Utamaro, evidently pleased.

"Yes, but—but what struck me?" stammered Wick.
"Was it an earthquake?"

He saw Utamaro and the Japanese lad exchange glances; then both smiled.

"No, not an earthquake," replied the former. "My

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nephew here, Tenaka, found it necessary to stop you, that's all."

Wick looked at the Japanese boy's slender body, and his amazement returned. He instinctively felt his own arm. It did not seem possible. There was some magic or hocus-pocus somewhere. Wick had been the victor in many a hard-fought battle at home with boys who apparently could wind this Japanese lad around their fingers.

Wick got to his feet. His eyes blazed with anger. For the moment all ideas of caution and tact were lost in the consuming desire to obtain satisfaction for the insult and humiliation to which he had been subjected. Squaring off before the Japanese boy, he shouted:

"I want you to understand that you can't make a monkey out of me. I am no baby to be treated like that. Come on!"

He aimed a blow at Tenaka and caught him fairly under the chin. The Japanese boy staggered back, and then fell full length upon the ground. Instead of intervening, Utamaro clapped his hands and laughed.

"Good blow!" he exclaimed. "That's the time you were caught unawares, nephew."

Wick stood on the defensive, ready to continue the fight as soon as his antagonist had regained his feet,

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but Tenaka, instead of offering battle, echoed his uncle's laugh.

"We are square now, as you say in English," he exclaimed, springing erect. "It served me right for not expecting a blow. I might have known that you would fight."

Something in the lad's manner, and in the winning expression of his intelligent face, caused Wick instinctively to like him. He felt that here was no upstart of a Japanese, offensive in his bearing, but one who might prove to be a very good friend. Wick held out his hand and said boyishly:

"Shake, will you? We are square now, as you say. I hope we will know each other long enough to enable you to explain how you did it. Cricky! I thought a mule had kicked me."

Tenaka shook hands with evident pleasure.

"It's easily explained," he said frankly. "I know a little of jiu jitsu. You have heard of it, of course?"

Wick nodded, greatly relieved.

"Yes, I have had it explained to me," he replied. "So that was how you knocked me out, eh? I knew there was some kind of a trick. How did you do it?"

Tenaka asked Wick to step toward him with his hands extended, then with scarcely an effort the slender

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Japanese boy caught him under one arm, pushed suddenly against his collar bone, and in a twinkling Wick went flying backward until he measured his length upon the ground.

"That settles it!" he exclaimed emphatically as he regained his feet. "I'll certainly try to learn that before I leave Japan. It's great!"

"Tenaka is an expert at jiu jitsu," testified Utamaro, "and I do not doubt that he will teach you some part of it. And now," he added dryly, "we might as well return to the house. I will not blame you for your attempt to escape, my son, it was only natural; but I hope you realize the futility of it. We have the place guarded pretty well, Tenaka and I, and you might as well resign yourself."

"Can I ask another question?" said Wick, as he accompanied them back to the house.

Utamaro nodded.

"Where is that—that——"

The Japanese interrupted him with a laugh.

"You mean the thing you saw in the window?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Tenaka will introduce you."

The Japanese lad slipped into the cottage, and pres-

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ently returned, carrying a papier-maché head. It was the grotesque face which had seemed so terrifying in the shadows of the window. Tenaka grinned as he held it up for inspection.

"Doesn't look so bad now?" he said. "It is only a mask which I was using to scare you. My uncle thought it might help to keep you inside the house, but it didn't."

It was now almost dark, and Utamaro lighted a huge Japanese lantern which hung from the ceiling of the outer room. Then he gravely bade Wick seat himself upon one of the mats scattered about the floor.

"I see that you are a boy of spirit," he said, "so we shall have to place you where it will be impossible for you to escape. I regret the necessity, as we were becoming good friends. Back of this house are the ruins of an old castle. In that castle you will remain until Mr. Beaumont or Mr. Girard sends word for you to be released. Tenaka and I shall take turns guarding you, and I want to say right now that another attempt to escape on your part will cause me to place you in the lowest dungeon of the castle, where you will find it expedient to fight for your life with an industrious colony of hungry rats."

"That doesn't frighten me," retorted Wick defiantly; then in a moment he regretted the speech. Since hearing

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Utamaro's explanation of Bushido, he realized that the Japanese undoubtedly felt that his action in assisting the two Englishmen was entirely honorable.

"I didn't mean—that is, I—I—" he stammered, then added respectfully, "I understand what you mean, Mr. Utamaro. You are determined to keep me here, and I am equally determined to leave. You can put me where you please, but the first chance I get I certainly will try to skip."

The Japanese did not reply. He regarded Wick moodily for a moment, then, picking up a lantern, motioned the two boys to follow.

To Wick it seemed a strange and almost weird walk from the cottage across the clearing to the mass of shadowy ruins half buried in the forest of dwarf trees. Utamaro led and Tenaka brought up the rear. No word was spoken; the little paper lantern scarcely furnished light enough to see the rough path. The night wind seemed cool and moist. There was a mild scent of flowers, and a tinge of piney odors from the main shore.

The front rampart of the castle was almost lost in a dense mass of creeping vines, and Utamaro had to force them away to gain entrance to a narrow doorway. Something wriggled past Wick's feet and vanished, hiss-

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ing, in the bushes as he followed the Japanese into the tunnel-like passage. Tenaka kicked at it and remarked quietly that it was a snake, of which there were many in the ruin.

The passage was littered with broken masonry and dank vegetation, and there was a musty smell which recalled a charnel house. About two yards from the entrance, a doorway led to the right and another to the left. Both were blocked with stone to within a foot of the top. Utamaro searched both crevices and finally produced a huge iron key. A moment later he was unlocking a stout wooden door at the inner end of the passage.

He handed the lantern to Tenaka and said:

"You know where the wood is. Build a fire, if it seems cool, and brew some tea for yourselves. You will find mats and covers in the smaller room. I will return at daybreak."

With that he was gone, locking the door behind him.

The two boys stood for a moment in silence. Wick glanced about him, but the darkness was so intense that he could not see more than five feet in the dim rays of the lantern. Overhead a black canopy dotted with stars indicated that the apartment was either roofless or an interior court. It proved to be the latter.

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"Well, there's no use in standing here," said Tenaka at last. He spoke pleasantly, and Wick gave him a grateful glance.

"We have to make ourselves comfortable for the night, and we might as well begin," continued the Japanese boy. "This place is the center of the old castle. It is a large court, with rooms opening from it. The walls are high and of smooth stone, as you will see in the morning. I may as well tell you that the only way out is through that door, and that is locked; so I hope you will not try to make trouble."

"Not to-night," replied Wick frankly.

"Good!"

Tenaka led the way across one corner of the court, which seemed well paved and free of rubbish. An open doorway gained into a small, square room with stone ceiling, walls, and floor. There were no windows, and no furniture except a bundle of mats and a few cooking utensils. In one corner was a pile of fagots, and from these the Japanese boy skillfully started a fire.

In a short time a kettle sent forth jets of steam very comfortable to see, and then tea was made. Although Wick had eaten heartily only a short time before, he enjoyed this second meal, and exchanged friendly glances with Tenaka while he ate.

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"Under other circumstances I would call this real jolly," he said at last. "I know lots of boys back home who would give anything to have this experience. It reminds me of the cave in 'Tom Sawyer,' only this is not a cave. Did you ever read 'Tom Sawyer'?"

Tenaka laughed and nodded his head.

"I certainly have," he replied, "and I found it very funny. I read lots of American books while I was at Rugby in England."

"So you have been to school in England," commented Wick, greatly interested. "That explains why you speak our language. I wish I could talk Japanese one tenth as well as you do English. Mr. Utamaro also speaks very good English. He is your uncle?"

"Yes, and the only near relative I have," replied the Japanese boy sadly. "My father was killed during the war with China. He was an officer in our navy, and when he died mother could not live. I have no sisters and no brothers. I was being educated to go as a cadet in our navy, but when uncle—when uncle——"

Tenaka hesitated and turned his head away. Wick understood.

"Well, you have traveled lots, haven't you?" he hastened to change the subject. "Been to England and other places? I hope to go to London and to the

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Continent, too, some day. Father is in the diplomatic service, you know. He may be sent as Ambassador to Great Britain when he is through here, or perhaps to Berlin or Paris. I am going into the service, too. President Roosevelt is trying to have new laws passed regulating the diplomatic service, and it will be worth while."

"I learned at school that the Americans hadn't any system at all," said Tenaka. "Your President can appoint anyone as minister or ambassador, and sometimes he selects a man because he did something for the party and not because he was fitted for diplomatic duties."

"That's true enough," admitted Wick, "or at least it used to be so. President Roosevelt, however, always considers the fitness of the man, and his ability for a particular place. I don't say that because he asked father to come here, but because everybody knows that it's true. The President is arranging things so our service will offer permanent positions to the best people."

Wick was so deeply interested in the subject that he almost forgot his surroundings, and the fact that he was a prisoner under most extraordinary circumstances. He felt a desire to explain to this friendly and intelligent lad enough of his life and his ambitions to enlist his sympathy, and perhaps aid. He instinctively felt that

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Tenaka was well disposed toward him, and he jumped to the conclusion, in the optimistic manner of youth, that Tenaka would be the means of his escaping from the island.

"To become a diplomat is an honorable ambition, as you know," he continued. "Ambassadors and ministers are respected and looked up to in all countries; they even represent the ruler direct. When they go aboard a man-of-war they get a salute, and when people want to meet the king or queen of a country, they must ask their minister or ambassador to introduce them. The pay is not much, of course, and you have to be rich to keep up your position, but that's going to be changed pretty soon. I am sure our Congress will vote for larger salaries. My father, as Minister to Japan, gets \$12,000 a year, but the position will be elevated to an ambassadorship pretty soon, and the salary will be at least \$17,500 a year."

"English ambassadors get more than that."

"Yes," admitted Wick, "and they pay their king about twenty-five times more than we pay our President; but that's only a detail, as my father says. It's the honor, not the money, that we look at. But I was telling you about my ambition to become a member of the diplomatic corps. By the time I am ready, which

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will be in two or three years, there will be a regular system. I will have to pass an examination in international law, and what father calls the usages of diplomacy. It will be necessary to know at least one foreign language, and to be pretty well educated. My cousin Larry—I haven't told you about him yet—and I have been studying under a tutor for more than a year, and we hope to know enough when it is time to take the examination. If I pass it will be into a corps of twenty or thirty young men who will be attached to the Diplomatic Bureau in the Department of State."

"At Washington?"

"Yes. I will be there about two years undergoing a training as secretary, and then will be sent abroad to some legation, where I'll stay for two years. Then I'll go back to spend a year in the department, and then will come another tour of foreign duty. I shall begin as a secretary to a legation, and if I show that I really have some brains I'll be promoted in time, perhaps to minister."

"That's a fine ambition," slowly said Tenaka. "I wish I had such a chance."

Wick sighed.

"Heigho! I guess you have as good a chance as I," he replied despondently.

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Tenaka looked up from where he was replenishing the fire.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just that. I did have a fine opportunity, but the President won't take the son of a diplomat who has failed. My father was sent here on an important mission. There's a plot against him, and he doesn't know it. I happened to learn about it, and the people in the plot fooled me into coming here, so I can't warn my father. You may say it isn't father's fault, but there's no excuse for failure in diplomacy. Now do you see why I have lost my opportunity?"

The Japanese lad slowly arranged the fagots, then he replaced the teapot and finally settled back upon the ground. For a full minute he sat there looking into the fire. His face was expressionless, but Wick knew that he was thinking deeply. At last he spoke, but without glancing up.

"So that is why you are here a prisoner, and why my uncle has asked me to help guard you?" he asked very quietly.

"That is the absolute truth, Tenaka."

"And those Englishmen are plotting against your honored father?"

"Yes."

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"I want to think it over, my friend," said Tenaka, after another pause. "In the morning I will tell you more. Good-night."

He rolled himself in a mat, and Wick presently followed his example, but it was well toward morning before Wick finally dropped asleep, and only then because utter weariness temporarily conquered the awakening of hope brought about by Tenaka's last words.

Shortly before dawn, just as the heavy pall of night began to give way before the coming sun, and while the old castle was still buried in shadows, the wooden door giving entrance to the court was cautiously opened.

A figure completely enshrouded in a heavy kimono stole into the court, and finally paused in a listening attitude at the doorway of the little room in which the boys were sleeping.

After a moment of hesitation the figure picked up one of the still burning brands from the fire and, holding it aloft as a torch, tiptoed into the room.

CHAPTER XIV

BETTY AND THE JUNK

WHEN Jehoshabeath Calkins Budd, familiarly known as Betty, was a very small boy, he delighted in a certain boys' game wherein it was necessary to close the eyes tightly and then count ten while the other boys concealed themselves.

Betty's mind, singularly enough, was intent on this game when he opened his eyes on board the junk some time after being tossed like a bag of meal into the after cabin.

For the moment he had not the slightest idea of his whereabouts. He tossed restlessly, groaned several times, then feebly sat upright. The interior of the cabin was not too dark for him to distinguish objects, and the first thing he saw was a burly Chinaman lying outstretched upon a shelf-like bunk.

The man's eyes were half closed, and he seemed to be contemplating a thin wreath of smoke curling up

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from a native pipe held between his teeth. There was little of furniture in the apartment—simply a rough table, a chair or two, a lighted lantern swinging from an overhead beam, and a pile of matting in one corner. The table was low and broad, and looked grotesque and strange to the lad. In fact, the whole scene was so strange and unreal to Betty that he closed his eyes again, but only for a moment.

He was recalled to a realization of his situation by the sound of a thin, high-pitched voice singing in some unknown tongue. It was the man in the bunk, and as Betty watched in amazement, he saw the Chinaman roll out upon the floor and, after making a desperate attempt to recover his balance, plunge directly toward him.

Betty tried to evade him but failed, and the two lunged against the side of the cabin in a heap. Betty fortunately was uppermost, and he managed to wriggle free. Retreating to the table, he quickly placed it between them.

“Look here, doggone it!” he shouted wrathfully; “what do you mean? I ain’t no door mat for you to lay on.”

The Chinaman, propped comfortably against the bulkhead, regarded him with a silly grin. He seemed in a

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most friendly mood, and his grin broadened into as near a laugh as one of his race can achieve.

"Whatee happen, white boy?" he queried amiably. "Me no hultee you. Me good Chinaman. Me sing flo you."

"I don't want you to sing for me," replied Betty, unappeased. "What do I care for your measly old song. Bedaddle! do you think I care shucks whether you make that kind of a noise or not? Say, you Chink, where am I, and what does all this mean?"

The Chinaman sat bolt upright at this question. He narrowed his slitlike eyes, and muttered something in what seemed like a threatening tone. Then, rising to his feet, he approached the table. Betty saw with alarm that his attitude was menacing, and he prepared to dodge in case of an attack.

The lad suddenly became aware of another most interesting complication. As he stood pressed against the table he felt the deck heel over, and there came to his ears the sound of a sail slatting against a mast.

"The doggone thing is moving," he muttered. "This is a fine place for me to be in. Bedaddle! that Jap who brought me here has a few things coming to him some day. He's played me an onery trick all right, all right."

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Despite the gravity of his present situation the boy's thoughts reverted to the events leading to his boarding the junk. He recalled with lightning rapidity the scene in front of the Grand Hotel, the appearance of the Japanese who introduced himself as Mr. Beaumont's valet, the jinrikisha trip around Yokohama, and finally the attack on the junk's deck.

Betty was no fool. His life had made him an exceedingly shrewd boy, and behind his rough exterior of good-natured buffoonery there was a deal of sound common sense. It did not take long for him to realize the true situation, and to his credit his first thought and fear were for Wickford Ralston.

"They've got him as sure as hops," was his muttered comment. "Poor old Wick."

During this very brief retrospect, Betty kept a wary eye on his companion. He knew that the Chinaman was crazy or under the influence of liquor, and equally dangerous in either case. The fellow had advanced until his outstretched hands touched the table, and thus the two stood looking into each other's face.

The junk lumbered along under a gentle breeze, the ungainly hull slipping and lurching in what evidently was a moderate sea. From the outer deck came a murmur of voices, an occasional command in Chinese, and the

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many odd sounds chorused by a wooden ship under way. The door was closed, but two oval windows set in the stern were open, and through these was revealed, as the junk rose and fell, a long fringe of lights marking the location of a city.

Betty was only half conscious of these impressions. He had more important business to attend to just at that moment. Fully convinced that his unknown and decidedly unprepossessing companion meant harm, he kept his hands lightly upon the table, and stood ready for a move.

He was not kept waiting very long.

"You callee me name," suddenly hissed the Chinaman. "You callee me Chink. I no likee that name. You one bad boy and I fixee you plenty quick."

Betty felt quite sure that the time had arrived for conciliatory methods, and for even an apology. He had used a name common enough among boys of a certain class, and he really meant no offense. He saw, however, that the Chinaman recognized the odium, and was bent on retaliation.

"I didn't mean to insult you, honest!" he exclaimed. "It was only— Hi! keep 'off, will you!"

The final words were forced from him by a totally unexpected move on the part of his antagonist. Watch-

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ing his opportunity the Chinaman threw himself across the low table and caught Betty by the collar before he could dodge.

Terror lent strength to the stout boy, however, and with a backward wrench he tore himself free. The next moment he made a spring for the door that would have surprised a long-jump athlete. With his hand on the latch Betty gave a frightened glance behind him, and saw that the Chinaman had scrambled erect.

"Bedaddle, it's me for the woods!" muttered the boy. "No crazy Chink—I mean Chinaman—in mine."

He tugged at the knob, and found to his immense relief that it yielded to his touch. In a twinkling he had bounded through the doorway, and not a second too soon. The Chinaman reached the entrance just as Betty gained the outer deck. The stout boy heard his pursuer shout an alarm, there was an answering cry, and a man rose directly in his path.

Thoroughly desperate and terrified, Betty let drive with both clenched fists, at the same time launching out with his right foot, a trick he had learned at home. The combination worked successfully, the man staggered back, and with a cry Betty scrambled across the sloping deck to the rail.

What followed seemed as indistinct as a dream. The

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boy knew that he stood poised upon the railing, he knew that a number of lights twinkled through the gloom in front of him, and he heard vaguely the jerky puffing of a motor launch which seemed to come from the water not a hundred yards away.

Behind him the deck of the junk resounded with the clamor of his pursuers. There was a scurrying of bare feet, several sharp commands, and then Betty felt a hand clutching at his coat.

"Help! help!" he cried shrilly.

At the same moment the desperate lad launched backward with one foot, kicking free from the grasp laid upon him; then, scarcely knowing what he did, he ran along the narrow rail to where the towering stern of the junk rose grotesquely above the sloping deck.

The man at the wheel, releasing the spokes for a moment, aimed a blow at him, but Betty dodged and finally managed to reach a vantage point directly over the counter, or stern. Here the railing was low and broad, and the fugitive found it easy to keep his balance.

Not one instant had he failed to keep up his cries for help. The proximity of the launch gave him hope, and he sent forth his shrill appeal without cessation. The hubbub below had suddenly ceased, and Betty saw

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the crew working at the sails. Then the junk began to alter its course, slanting away from the cluster of lights.

"Bedaddle, they are afraid of something!" murmured Betty. "It must be that launch."

The fear that he would be carried away from possible rescue lent strength to the boy's voice, and he renewed his outcry. Suddenly the explosive puffing of the unseen launch ceased, then a voice came from the darkness. The words were in an unknown tongue to Betty, but it was evident the junk's crew understood them.

To the stout boy's intense joy and relief, the wheel was put over, the great matlike sails hung shivering from the yards, and the junk's headway slackened and finally ceased.

The puffing of the launch began once more, and a few minutes later Betty saw it emerge from the gloom and swing around within a few yards of the stern. Without waiting for a call from the launch, Betty leaned far over and shouted:

"Hi! won't you please take me off this boat? The Chinks are running away with me. Quick, take me off, please take me off."

There came an answering hail, and to Betty's great relief the words were English.

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"Who are you, and what are you doing on that junk?"

Betty fairly hugged himself. He could scarcely believe his ears. Ignoring the possibility of further danger, he jumped to the deck and ran forward to a point from where he could be seen. Waving his arms to attract attention, he shouted in reply:

"I am an American boy, and I was shanghaied aboard this boat. The Chinks are trying to take me somewhere, and I want to get ashore. Won't you please come aboard?"

"Stay where you are, and we'll look into the matter," was the response.

The launch was run alongside, and presently Betty saw a man in uniform climb to the deck. One of the junk's crew, apparently the captain, met him at the gangway and attempted to speak, but the officer impatiently waved him aside and beckoned to Betty.

"Now, what is all this about?" he asked authoritatively.

The stout boy saw that the officer was Japanese, and that he was clad in naval uniform. He realized that safety had indeed come to him, and unable to restrain the tears of joy, he fell to weeping.

"Don't cry," said the officer kindly. "You are in

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no danger now. Just tell me all about it, and if wrong has been done I'll see that punishment is given to the guilty."

In a few words Betty told how he had been inveigled on board the junk, but he carefully refrained from mentioning the names of the Englishmen. He professed ignorance of the cause for the kidnaping, intimating that probably he had been wanted to help work the junk. This insinuation was scouted by the Japanese officer.

"That's all nonsense," interrupted the latter. "Chinese junks don't rely on boys to sail the seas, and anyway they wouldn't dare shanghai an American or English boy. Come, now, you haven't told me all. Where were you when this man brought you on board?"

"I was waiting in front of the Grand Hotel," confessed Betty.

"Waiting for whom?"

Betty wriggled and dabbed at his eyes with a handkerchief. Deep down in his consciousness was the belief that all Wick had told him must be kept absolutely secret; that it would be disloyal to his friend to breathe one word of the plot involving Wick and the Englishmen.

"Speak, my lad," insisted the Japanese officer. "If you do not freely explain, I shall be compelled to believe

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that you have something to be ashamed of. Who do you know in Yokohama?"

"I—I know the American Minister to Japan," stammered Betty.

"The American Minister?"

"That is—I mean his son, Wickford Ralston. He and I——"

The Japanese officer interrupted him with a hasty gesture.

"You know Wickford Ralston?" he echoed eagerly. "Where is he? When did you see him last? Quick, answer, boy!"

CHAPTER XV

BETTY GOES TO TOKYO

BETTY felt greatly disturbed. He was between the horns of a very unpleasant dilemma. In blurting out Wick's name he had no idea that it would create such unwonted excitement. The attitude of the Japanese officer was unmistakable, however. That he knew Wick, or had heard of his rescue from the sea could not be doubted.

How much did he know, and what was his reason for demanding knowledge of Wick's present whereabouts? Betty, naturally suspicious and inclined to view every man as a possible enemy, almost regretted that he had appealed for help. He resolved to be wary in his statements.

"Do you know Wickford Ralston?" he temporized.

"Yes," replied the Japanese officer impatiently. "Never mind that, but tell me when you saw him the last time. And mind you"—his face became stern and almost threatening—"if you lie to me, I'll see that you regret it."

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"I'm not going to lie to you, sir," replied Betty, pretending indignation. "I am telling the truth, sir; hope I may die if I ain't. I just wanted to know if you are a friend of my friend, that's all. Won't you please tell me who you are, and then I'll tell you how I happened to meet Wick."

"I had the pleasure of saving him, or helping to save him at sea," explained the officer. "I was on the submarine which picked him up after he had fallen overboard from a Pacific Mail liner. Now——"

"Are you Lieutenant Yatsui?" interrupted Betty doubtfully.

"No. My name is Shimamura. I was second in command of the submarine."

"I heard Wick speak about you, sir," quickly replied Betty. "Bedaddle, I am glad to know you! Wick said you were good to him. Say, I'll tell you about him. When I saw Wick last he went in at the door of the Grand Hotel. I was to wait for him, but that measly fellow came along and invited me to see the town. Then he brought me aboard this hooker, and—and here I am."

"You don't know where Wickford Ralston is?"

"No. Honest, I don't. How did you know he didn't meet his father?"

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"Because the Honorable Minister from the United States has sent out an alarm for the lad," replied Lieutenant Shimamura gravely. "Word came to Yokosuka—that's the place over there where you see the lights—that he had disappeared. I am interested in the lad, having met him under such remarkable circumstances, and that is why I appeared so anxious to learn his whereabouts. You met him on the way to Yokohama?"

Betty told of his encounter with Wick, not even omitting his flight from Captain Peters's ship. It was evident from the Japanese officer's bearing that he believed the story.

"Now I suppose you want to get ashore?" Shimamura said finally.

"Just as quick as I can, sir."

"All right; hop into the launch. I will settle with these scamps."

While Betty hastened to leave the junk, the lieutenant talked harshly to the Chinese captain for a moment. The fellow seemed frightened, and abjectly prostrated himself upon the deck, where Shimamura left him. The junk lost no time in hoisting sail and disappearing in the darkness.

"It is lucky for you that I happened to be coming along," smiled the lieutenant as he rejoined Betty in the

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launch. "That craft is bound to Shanghai, and goodness knows what would have happened to you before it arrived there."

"I was having the time of my life when you hove in sight," explained the stout boy. "Bedaddle, it was worse than a Chink's scrap in Chinatown! When I woke up in that cabin I thought it was a nightmare. Say, what time is it, anyway?"

Shimamura pointed toward the East where a faint rosy light was tingeing the distant horizon.

"It will be daylight in a half hour," he replied.

"Daylight?" echoed Betty in bewilderment. "Then I must have slept all night on the junk."

"All night?" exclaimed the lieutenant. "You've been longer than that on board the junk. When did young Ralston leave you in front of the hotel?"

"Yesterday afternoon, of course."

"That can't be. This is early Wednesday morning. We picked him up at sea Monday night, and according to your story you met him in Yokosuka the following morning. No, the Chinamen drugged you, my lad, and you have been unconscious at least thirty-four hours."

Betty's dismay was almost laughable.

"Bedaddle, it's the first time I ever had a chance to sleep that long," he exclaimed. "Thirty-four hours and

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nothing to eat. Gee! I've got to make up for breakfast, dinner, and supper somewhere."

"The junk probably was not ready to sail that night, and they kept you drugged until they left port. Now tell me, lad, what is your plan? Where do you want to go?"

Betty did not answer for a while. The question set him to thinking. Where could he go, and what would be the best thing for him to do? He felt instinctively that something had happened to Wick, and he resolved to visit the Grand Hotel and make inquiries. And he also resolved not to mention his suspicions to Lieutenant Shimamura.

In the event of his finding that Wick had disappeared, he realized that his best step would be to proceed straight to Tokyo and see Larry.

"Wick wouldn't want me to tell his father," he mused, "and I won't unless Larry makes me. I'll just talk it over with him. Wick said he was a wise boy, and knew more than lots of men."

"I don't just know what I will do, sir," he said at last. "I'll spy around the Grand Hotel first, and then think it over. I don't know a single soul in Japan except Captain Peters and his crew, and I am sure I won't go near them."

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"Have you—have you any money?" asked Shimamura. "I would be glad to help you as much as I can."

Betty felt very grateful. He was absolutely penniless, and he accepted a small loan from the kindhearted officer. In due time he was landed, and, after having breakfast, was escorted to the railway station by the lieutenant, who answered for him to the authorities. Shortly before noon the stout boy again found himself in front of the Grand Hotel on the Bund of Yokohama.

Without hesitation he entered the hotel and sought out the clerk.

"I do not know anything about such a boy," said the man. "I can't keep track of everybody who visits this hotel."

Further inquiries were equally unsuccessful, except to the effect that both Mr. Beaumont and Mr. Girard were gone without leaving an address.

"You may find them in Tokyo," suggested the clerk indifferently, as he turned to greet a new arrival.

"Bedaddle, that's just where I'll go!" remarked Betty.

He learned that a train would leave shortly for the capital, and he hastened to the station in a jinrikisha. During the ride of an hour or more while the English-

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built train was rattling between rice fields or skirting the edges of low-lying plains, Betty attempted to figure out a definite plan of action.

He felt the weight of responsibility more than ever before in his idle, happy-go-lucky young life. He realized fully that much would depend upon his coming talk with Larry Ralston, and deep down in his heart he resolved that no matter how Wick's cousin viewed the situation, he, Betty, would never cease his efforts to aid the friend who had brought the first few kind words into his life.

Betty did not boast of much education. He was a rough-and-ready lad with an optimistic view of life and a tremendous vein of good nature and high spirits, but the streak of gratitude in him was almost prominent enough to be visible. And the greater part of that streak showed itself every time he thought of Wick.

Betty sat in the second-class carriage and tried to form some idea of the situation. No matter how he regarded it, the affair looked black. He did not believe that violence had been done, but he knew from his own experience that it was quite possible Wick had been forcibly taken from the country.

There was now no doubt that Wick had not gone to his father at Tokyo. The fact that Mr. Ralston had sent

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out an alarm for the lad indicated that he had not rejoined his parent.

"No, those two men got on to Wick somehow," murmured Betty, as he gazed absently through the carriage window. "They have chased him off somewhere, and it's up to Jehoshabeath Calkins Budd to get busy and find him. I wonder how Wick's cousin will line up? If he doesn't deliver the goods when I tell my little tale, I'll have to lick him, I guess."

The Shimbashi station of Tokyo presented a most animated spectacle as the train steamed in. The station building, constructed on the European plan, generally bare and bald, with a mingled odor of grime and desolation, had been transformed overnight into a gorgeous bower of military decorations.

Flags and banners, gay streamers, and paper balloons representing every conceivable kind of animal fluttered and swung in the breeze. The station platform was clear, but the street opening on the railway grounds was packed with a dense mass of people kept in place by a number of alert policemen.

Like all Japanese crowds, the front line was given up to little children. Back of them were women, and behind the women were lines of men, some clad in European costumes, but the vast majority in typical Japanese

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dress. There was little noise, and the crowd seemed most orderly.

"Bedaddle, they are receiving me like a king!" muttered Betty quaintly. "If Boston could only see me now."

As the train stopped, the music of several military bands came from a side street, and then a regiment of soldiers in uniforms that had apparently seen service marched into view. It was a part of the victorious army recently returned from the front.

The soldiers marched like veterans, and even Betty, unused to military spectacles, realized that these little brown men, undersized as we regard stature, were almost perfect in discipline and bearing.

"Banzai! Banzai!" came in a roar from the crowd. Then a number of the spectators took up a refrain which had rung through the island since the Battle of the Sea of Japan:

"Nippon Kata, Nippon Kata!
Rushia Maketa!"

Long afterward Betty learned that it meant, "Japan is on topside, Japan is on topside; Russia is down below!"

Renewed cheers, prolonged, greeted the song, then

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came a sudden hush. A bugle sounded in the distance, there was a cessation of the day fireworks, and then a gorgeous state carriage was driven rapidly to the station.

By this time Betty had descended from the train. Before he could see the occupant of the carriage he was hurried with the other passengers across a platform to a side entrance. He heard a man, evidently an Englishman or American, say to a companion:

"It's the Crown Prince. I guess he feels proud of his soldiers all right."

Betty felt tempted to linger, but his anxiety to see Larry caused him to lose no time. He edged his way through the crowd and finally found a policeman who told him the direction in which lay that quarter of the city occupied by the foreign legation buildings.

Betty counted his change and found that he had enough to hire a jinrikisha, so he engaged one and told the coolie, "Hayaku!" which means "hurry," and which formed one of the few Japanese words Betty had learned during his very brief stay in Japan.

Tokyo is almost European in appearance near the Shimbashi station. The majority of the houses are built after Western models, and tramways run through some of the streets and whirl perilously around sharp corners very like our own trolleys.

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One of the main streets, called the Ginza but known as the Japanese "Broadway," is lined with brick and stone buildings, and it looked almost like an American thoroughfare to Betty as he was carried down its well-kept pavement in the jinrikisha. Presently the little carriage was whirled past a quaint moat, broad and spiral in shape. It marks the site of the Mikado's palace, situated in the very heart of Tokyo. In feudal days the Shogun's castle occupied the inner ring of a number of moats connected by canals with the river. When the Emperor came up from Kioto and made Tokyo his capital in 1869, the year of the Restoration, the former Shogun's palace became his home and the supreme seat of government.

To-day a costly and modern palace occupies the grounds, and as Betty passed in his jinrikisha he caught his first glimpse of imperial Japan. It must be confessed, however, that he paid little attention to his surroundings. The bustle and animation of the streets, the broad stretches of garden and park lands, the interminable procession of soldiers, and even the gayety of a gay capital in a fever of military successes, appealed little to him.

The ride finally ended. The kurumaya swung his jinrikisha around in front of an imposing structure which, built by the Japanese Government and rented to

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the United States, was finally purchased by the latter as a legation. On all sides were handsome buildings in parklike grounds, each bearing the distinctive flag of a foreign government. Not far away was a whole colony of buildings in the midst of a large walled park, over which floated the English flag.

Betty caught all this at a glance, then, while he stood hesitating in front of the American Legation, a youth clad in white linen and wearing an American straw hat stepped out upon the sidewalk and beckoned to a group of kurumayas across the street.

Betty recognized him instantly. There was no mistaking the intelligent, studious face, the stooping shoulders, and the limping walk.

It was Lawrence Ralston.

For a moment the stout boy stood irresolute. For some reason he felt abashed. His own clothing seemed cheap and shabby, and he realized for the first time that his bearing and attitude were different, and that his station in life was inferior to that of youths like Lawrence Ralston.

He brushed the feeling away with a half laugh, then walking up to Larry he said simply:

"I want to see you for a minute. I guess you are Larry Ralston, aren't you?"

CHAPTER XVI

LARRY AND BETTY TAKE UP THE TRAIL

FOR a proper understanding of this remarkable chapter in America's diplomatic history, it will be necessary to return to the part played by United States Minister Ralston and Wick's cousin, Lawrence Ralston.

The supposed loss of his son from the Pacific Mail liner almost prostrated Mr. Ralston, whose life had been wrapped up in his boy since the death of his wife. During the first shock, Mr. Ralston practically made up his mind to cable Washington that he would be unable to continue his diplomatic work, but his sense of duty caused him to change his mind.

When the steamer reached Yokohama, a tug bearing the first and second secretaries of the United States Legation who had come down from Tokyo to meet their new chief, boarded the vessel as soon as the anchor was dropped. Their greeting was respectful and sad, as they had learned through the wireless message published in

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the morning's papers of the supposed loss of the diplomat's son.

No time was lost in landing. The usual routine of customs declarations does not apply to the diplomatic corps, and the party quickly took the train for the capital.

Minister George Ralston's reputation was so widely known that the Americans living in Tokyo had planned a public reception at the Shimbashi station, but this ceremony also was postponed. Several prominent members of the diplomatic corps met him, however, and conveyed to the bereaved father their feeling of sympathy.

It was a melancholy welcome, and Larry Ralston felt that nothing would be of interest to him during their stay at Tokyo.

Minister Ralston took up his duties almost automatically. His predecessor had left several days before to take charge of the Chinese Legation at Peking, and there was ample work to engross the new minister's attention. He immediately closeted himself with his secretaries and plunged into the task awaiting him.

Disconsolate and very lonesome, Larry strolled about the legation building, listlessly inspecting the palatial structure officially provided by the United States Government for its representative at the Mikado's court.

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Under other conditions the boy would have been deeply interested in the official machinery of the legation, but as it was he paid little attention even to the arrival of a member of the Mikado's staff, who came from the palace to deliver to Minister Ralston his Majesty's personal expression of sympathy.

The official, an aged Japanese in a gorgeous uniform, came in a grand state carriage accompanied by four outriders. He spoke English like a native, and, after explaining that the emperor was away from the city, offered the condolences of the Government.

It was shortly after this incident that Larry, who happened to be watching the passing of a troop of cavalry *en route* to the railway station, noticed a telegraph messenger enter the legation. Something prompted him to accost the messenger, and he was given a telegram addressed to him. It was the message sent from Yokohama by Wick.

Larry read the contents at a glance, then with a cry that startled the messenger, he rushed into Mr. Ralston's private office. The diplomat was engaged with his first secretary and the naval and military attachés, and he looked up in amazement at the intrusion.

"Wick! He's alive!" gasped Larry. "Here's a message from him. O Uncle George, Wick's alive and

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well! He has been picked up at sea and he is in Yokohama now."

Mr. Ralston's ruddy face whitened as he snatched the telegram from the half-crying lad. He read the words and then bowed his head. The other occupants of the room, with the exception of Larry, softly withdrew.

"I just knew that Wick would be saved," sobbed Larry. "He—he can take care of himself, that boy. And didn't he do it fine? Just floated around until that Japanese submarine boat picked him up. But say, uncle, why doesn't he come here? He says he has important reasons. What can they be?"

That particular question also interested Mr. Ralston. When the first overwhelming feeling of relief and thankfulness had passed, he naturally felt somewhat disturbed by the vague statement made by Wick. He thoroughly trusted his boy, but at the same time he believed that Wick's place was with him.

A diplomat's wishes receive instant attention, and Minister Ralston soon had the wires busy consulting the local authorities of Yokohama. He also communicated with the naval station at Yokosuka, but all he could learn from the latter point was that Wick had been landed and had taken a train for Yokohama.

This procedure on the part of his uncle gave Larry

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something to do, and he spent the following twenty-four hours in the search for Wick. He had about made up his mind to run down to Yokohama when he was approached by Betty, as described in the last chapter.

"I want to see you for a moment," said the strange boy. "I guess you are Larry Ralston, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am Larry Ralston," replied the lame youth politely. "What can I do for you?"

"I have come to see you about your cousin."

Larry caught him by the arm.

"About Wick?" he cried eagerly. "Do you know where he is?"

Betty shook his head.

"I don't know where Wick is just now, but I saw him day before yesterday," he replied. "He's in trouble, I think. And I've come to you to——"

He ceased abruptly and stared open-mouthed after a man being drawn past in a jinrikisha. The occupant of the little carriage was stout, red-faced, and wore a single eyeglass.

"Bedaddle, that's one of 'em now!" cried Betty. "It's Mr. Beaumont."

With that he scurried after the jinrikisha, leaving Larry on the sidewalk in profound amazement. As the

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lame boy watched he saw the jinrikisha turn into the compound over which floated the English flag.

A few feet behind trailed Betty, puffing and blowing in a strenuous effort to catch up with the vehicle.

Lawrence Ralston was not easily surprised, but the unexpected appearance of the strange youth in a nondescript ship's uniform, and the startling announcement that he knew Wick, disturbed him mightily.

He stared after the stout boy as in a dream, then the sudden fear that he might lose sight of him caused him to hasten down the thoroughfare as fast as his lame leg permitted. Before he could reach the great gates of the British Legation park, he saw Betty turn and walk back.

"Bedaddle, I almost did it!" exclaimed the stout boy as Larry joined him. "Another minute and Mr. Beaumont would have seen me, then the jig sure would have been up."

"Say, I don't know who you are," spoke out Larry with emphasis, "but you've got to tell me what you know about my cousin. You say you saw him day before yesterday?"

Betty nodded vigorously, and glanced back toward the British Legation gates.

"There's a man in there I want to see," he replied. "At least, I want to see where he goes when he comes

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out. If you'll come over to that corner near the trees, I'll watch the gate and talk at the same time."

"You are making a deal of mystery," commented Larry impatiently. "If you are trying any game, you will be sorry."

"Bedaddle! there's a game in it, but not of my making," replied Betty as they reached the corner. "Honest, Mr. Ralston, I don't blame you for being in a hurry. I was in a hurry to get here and tell you what I know about Wick."

He briefly described his meeting with Wickford and their subsequent journey to Yokohama, then he said frankly:

"Now, Mr. Ralston, your cousin hasn't a better friend in the world than me. He treated me white, and gave me a kind word when I was being kicked about and chased by a brute of a skipper. I'd do anything for him, and when he tells me to keep mum, a pair of whales couldn't drag my mouth open. Wick and I heard something on the train coming up from Yokosuka—something very important about his father. He didn't learn enough to amount to anything, so he made up his mind to learn more. He sure wanted to see his dad and you, but he feared that he'd lose sight of two men who said the things we overheard."

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"What did they say?" asked Larry, deeply interested.

Betty shook his head.

"I can't tell you, at least not yet. Wick didn't want his dad to know because he was afraid Mr. Ralston would make him come to Tokyo before he found out the rest. I can tell you, though, that Wick was offered a job by one of the men who didn't know who he was. We went to the Grand Hotel in Yokohama, and that's where I lost Wick."

"Perhaps he is at the Grand Hotel now."

"No. I went there this morning. The clerk didn't remember him."

"That doesn't mean much," said Larry. "He may be on his way here."

"I tell you he is in trouble," insisted Betty. "When you hear what happened to me, you'll believe so, too."

While Larry listened with set face and in utter amazement and alarm, the stout boy told him of his adventures on the junk. At its conclusion Larry drew a long breath, then he caught Betty by the arm.

"You've got to tell my uncle all about it," he said decisively. "We mustn't wait another minute."

But Betty hung back.

"I'll not do it," he protested emphatically, "I'll

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fight first. Wick told me not to tell, and I won't; so there! If you want to help me find him, just say so. If you don't, I'll go it alone."

"But Wick may be in great danger. The police must be told. Uncle is the United States Minister here, and the Japanese Government will turn things upside down for him. Don't be foolish. Come with me at once."

The stout boy planted both feet squarely upon the pavement and folded his arms. Then he said significantly:

"I don't know you, and I don't know Wick; I don't know anybody. I am only a poor ship's boy ashore on a lark. I don't know Mr. Ralston, and all I want is to get back to my ship. Understand?"

Larry stood back in despair. He was shrewd enough to see that he had made a mistake. He realized that Betty was determined to keep his word to Wick, and that he would even return to Captain Peters before telling another word.

"All right," he said shortly. "If you won't, you won't. I still believe you are wrong, but have your own way. Will you tell me the names of the two men, and what they said if I promise not to say anything to my uncle?"

AT THE MIKADO'S COURT

"Will you help me to find Wick?"

"You can bet your life I will."

Betty's face beamed with joy.

"Now we are on the right course," he exclaimed, "with a fair wind, a clear sky, and duff on the table. If we don't find Wick before another dog watch, it's because we're not a good combination."

"When you are quite finished with those metaphorical aphorisms, please tell me what you know about Wick," said Larry.

"Bedaddle, you are the wise boy!" replied Betty admiringly. "Talk like a dictionary, don't you? That's just what Wick said. 'Larry only needs a cupola and a big bell to be a Rockefeller college,' he said. Well, now about the trouble."

He shot another keen glance at the legation gates, and proceeded:

"It's something about a plot. When we boarded the train at Yokosuka there were two men in the car—a big, red-faced man, the chap you saw in that jinrikisha a few minutes ago, and a tall, dark man. Their names were Beaumont and Girard, and Wick thinks they belong to the British diplomatic corps. While we were sailing—I mean steaming—along, Wick heard one of them mention Mr. Ralston's name. They added something in

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French which Wick said was about Mr. Ralston's duty and some documents and five thousand pounds which Mr. Beaumont was to get, and that Mr. Ralston was not a man to be fooled with. I can't remember the exact words, but Wick, he thought it was awfully important, and he got terribly excited about it. That's all."

"No wonder Wick was excited," muttered Larry to himself. He added aloud:

"This is very important—er——"

"Betty is my name. Jehoshabeath Calkins Budd for long, but please don't call me all of them. Plain Betty suits me."

"Well, Betty, this information is of utmost importance to my uncle, so much so that I am going to ask you again to let me tell him. There's more at stake than we know. It may mean a big plot—think of it!—and it is our duty, your duty and mine, to our Government to tell Uncle George all that we know. Now think, precious time is being lost, and we haven't any right to delay another minute. Won't you let me tell Uncle George?"

Betty shook his head so emphatically that Larry realized further effort to be useless.

"No, I won't have it," replied the stout boy. "You can just make up your mind to it once and for all. We

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must be trying to find Wick. That's how we are wasting time."

"Well, please tell me how two boys in a strange country can play detective? We are not magicians. We haven't any Aladdin's lamp to rub and summon a mighty djinn to our aid. Do be sensible."

"Oh, I am sensible enough," retorted Betty. "I am going to find Wick, and you can lay your last yen on that. I have a scheme. I believe that Wick has been shanghaied, same as I was. Well, old Beaumont and Girard must have done it. Now it's up to us to follow Beaumont when he comes out of that place and see where he goes. He knows me so I must keep under cover. He don't know you, so you're the one to do the chasing."

"Suppose I do follow him?" asked Larry incredulously. "You don't think he has Wick in a closet at his hotel, do you?"

"No, but sooner or later either he or Mr. Girard will go to where Wick is, you see if they don't."

"I suppose I must do as you say, but it's rank foolishness."

Betty eyed the speaker with no loss of his habitual good nature.

"You'll make a fine detective before I am through

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with you," he said quaintly. "Some day you will take off your bonnet and give Betty a vote of thanks for learning you how to be a Sherlock Holmes in three lessons by mail. But say, I'll tell you this much: If we haven't found Wick or got a fine trace of him by this time to-morrow, I'll let you tell your uncle. Is that all right?"

"Good!" exclaimed Larry in great relief.

"Now, I'll tell you another part of my scheme," went on Betty. "If we can't do nothing else after we have traced that fat, red-faced dub to his lair, we'll just face him and say that we'll have him arrested for stealing a boy, and we'll tell the Mikado on him if he don't give Wick up."

Larry's intelligent face brightened.

"That's not a bad plan," he agreed hastily. "If Beaumont and Girard have been up to any deviltry, if they have had Wick shanghaied or hidden away to keep him from communicating with his father, they are certainly playing a desperate game, and they know it will mean trouble and disgrace to them if they are caught."

"They are acting like a pair of loonies. Bedaddle! they must know they can't do tricks like that nowadays."

"Some queer things are done in diplomacy," replied Larry with a grim smile. "In the practice of diplomacy

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are few scruples. A foreign minister wouldn't think of picking pockets, but he would not hesitate to steam open a diplomat's letters, and even to steal a cipher code. In Europe, governments don't send important documents by mail, but maintain a costly messenger service. The king's messengers in England are well born, and the position is one of considerable honor. In my opinion, Beaumont and Girard found that they had talked too much, and they were driven to a criminal action."

"They didn't count me," said Betty with a grin.

"No. They think you are out of the way for good, and——"

Betty interrupted him with a quick gesture.

"Sh-h-h! there he goes now," whispered the stout boy, pointing to where a jinrikisha had emerged from the legation gates. "That's Mr. Beaumont."

Larry was quick to act. In an emergency of this nature he possessed the coolness of a tried veteran. In thought and mind he was a man; in quickness of perception and in decision he was one always worthy of reliance. Without a word of protest from Betty he now assumed the leadership.

"I do not know if you have any money or not, but here are five yen," he said hurriedly. "I will follow

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Beaumont in a jinrikisha, and you follow me. If you lose me, come back to this spot and wait."

With that he was gone, hobbling across the street. A jinrikisha picked him up, and he was soon whirling down the thoroughfare a short distance behind Mr. Beaumont. Betty called another vehicle and told the kurumaya with gesticulations to follow Larry.

And now a strange thing happened.

As Betty's jinrikisha moved away with the stout boy looking eagerly ahead, another jinrikisha whirled from a side street into the thoroughfare fronting the foreign legations. In this carriage rode a tall, swarthy man clad in white linen and wearing a pith helmet.

He half rose from his seat as he caught sight of Betty, then with an ejaculation of amazement he leaned forward and said something to his kurumaya, which caused the coolie to draw the jinrikisha over into the shadow of the trees and press after the other carriages.

CHAPTER XVII

IN GRAVE PERIL

WICKFORD RALSTON ordinarily was not a heavy sleeper. While at boarding school in Indiana some whimsical idea had caused him to practice the art of sleeping lightly, and it was his boast that the slightest sound would awaken him.

When he wrapped himself in the slumber mat, and, following Tenaka's example, had composed himself for the night in the ancient castle's cell-like room, it was not to sleep, but really to review the remarkable incidents crowding the past several days.

Toward morning, however, he dozed, and it was from one of these little snatches of sleep that he awoke to see a flaring torch appear at the entrance to the room.

He saw the bearer, a weird, muffled figure, slowly walk through the doorway, and he held his breath and peered through half-closed eyes as the apparition stopped and bent over him. Wick's nerves were steady, and

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although he prepared for a defense in case of attack, he made no movement.

It was Utamaro, but so transfigured that Wick scarcely recognized him. The man's face was deathly white even in the ruddy glow of the torch. His eyes blazed, his lips were parted, and he breathed heavily, as if under stress of some great excitement.

He held the torch close to Wick's face, so close in fact that the heat was almost unbearable, and muttered some strange singsong sentence. Then he turned away and left the room as abruptly as he had entered it.

He was hardly out of sight when Wick threw back the cover and stood up. He felt greatly disturbed, not to say frightened, and his first thought was to secure some weapon for use in case Utamaro returned and attempted harm.

In casting about he happened to look over toward Tenaka's corner. The Japanese youth had wakened and was sitting up with his back to the wall.

Wick saw from his startled expression that he had seen his uncle, but before Wick could speak Tenaka said reassuringly:

"Don't be alarmed, friend. Everything is all right."

"You saw him then?" asked Wick.

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"Yes, I saw him."

"What did he want?"

Before replying, Tenaka stole to the door and looked out into the shadowy court. He stood there as if both watching and listening for the space of two or three minutes, then he stirred up the dying embers of the fire and returned.

Wick saw that he seemed anxious and extremely depressed.

"Would you mind if I cooked some breakfast first?" he asked evasively. "It is morning, and we might as well eat a little."

"I would prefer to know now," replied Wick steadily. "If there is any danger, it is well for me to know it, don't you think?"

Tenaka nodded drearily.

"I don't think uncle meant any harm, friend, but I will confess that he is not himself when he has attacks like that. Uncle Sakae had trouble in London, as you know. The trouble was a terrible blow to him, and—and he—well, he loses his mind at times. He has not had one of the spells for almost a year. It is only when he is greatly excited or something happens to disturb him that he acts like that. I had no idea that one was coming on, or I would have watched out instead of go-

ing to sleep. He was all right last night; it must have been your attempt to escape."

"I don't know what caused it, but Mr. Utamaro certainly was changed. He looked like—like a crazy man. I am sorry, Tenaka, indeed I am, but this thing makes matters worse. Do you think Mr. Girard or Mr. Beaumont knows about it?"

"No."

"I thought not. They never would have gone to the desperate extreme of putting me in the hands of a crazy man."

The boys huddled about the fire as the early dawn brought a chill wind into the court. It was now light enough for Wick to see his surroundings.

The general plan of the palace had been that of a great quadrangle with a low tower at each corner. There was only one moat, which Wick and his guards had crossed in the night. The lake itself formed another moat of considerable value in defensive work.

Wick noticed that the castle walls were wonders of masonry, single stones fully forty feet in length and eight or ten feet square composing the sides of the main entrance. Other stones at least fifteen feet in height, and roughly cut as they came from the quarry, formed the greater part of the walls.

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In places where the moss or creeping vines had not intruded were evidences of quaint carving and metal ornamentation. The remains of a broad, sloping stairway of stone lay in a crumbling heap, and in the center of the court was the top of an ornamental stone well which doubtless had played an important part in the ancient defenses.

"This was a favorite place of retreat for a shogun who lived more than seven hundred years ago," explained Tenaka. "For centuries after he died it was considered one of the best examples of feudal fortresses, but one of our playful earthquakes shook it to pieces one night, and the island has been abandoned, or was, until my uncle leased it and built the house you saw yesterday."

As Tenaka ceased speaking both heard a key grate in the ponderous lock.

The Japanese boy looked very grave.

"Don't be alarmed," he said in a whisper. "If Uncle Sakae is—is in that condition, leave him to me. He does not know anything about jiu-jitsu, and I think I can handle him. Sh-h! here he is."

The sun had not yet risen above the neighboring hills, but that part of the court in which the boys stood was free of shadows. The door itself, a massive wooden panel set between great stone blocks, was clearly re-

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vealed, and as it flew back under the pressure behind it, Wick and Tenaka realized that their worst fears had come true.

Utamaro, pale and frenzied, crouched in the opening.

"Crazy! Mad as a March hare," muttered Wick, hardly knowing what he said.

He did not move; he could not, but stood as if fascinated by the terrible expression disfiguring Utamaro's countenance.

"Stay where you are, friend," warned Tenaka.

The boy spoke without taking his eyes from his uncle's face. For fully a minute this tableau remained unchanged, then Utamaro began creeping from the doorway.

He did not stand erect, but walked half doubled and with arms outstretched. He made no sound save a sibilant hissing of the breath drawn through clenched teeth. His hat was gone, his kimono flapped unheeded about his legs, and despite the coolness of the early morning, great beads of perspiration bathed his face and neck.

As Utamaro crept toward the boys, Wick saw Tenaka draw himself together as if for an effort. The Japanese boy's face was set but calm. He looked as if he had a most painful duty to perform, but was thoroughly resolved to do that which was before him.

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Suddenly he called out soothingly in Japanese. The words were unheeded by his uncle. He tried it again, at the same time moving forward step by step. The crazy man also advanced, and suddenly, as Wick watched with profound interest, Utamaro straightened and made a spring toward Tenaka.

It was never quite clear to Wick just what followed. He saw Tenaka dart adroitly aside, reach out with both arms and then, after a very brief struggle, Utamaro's head sank upon his shoulders and his body collapsed awkwardly upon the ground.

CHAPTER XVIII

WICK ESCAPES FROM THE ISLAND

WICK ran forward as he saw that Utamaro had been disabled. He was half-sobbing in his excitement. As he reached Tenaka's side he saw the Japanese boy's face blanch to the whiteness of paper, then with a deep sigh Tenaka tottered and fell across his uncle's body.

For one brief moment Wick stood irresolute. This second catastrophe was so entirely unexpected that he did not know what to do. Then he caught up Tenaka's limp body and propped him against an adjacent wall. The boy was breathing, but his face wore an expression of severe pain.

It was indeed a most trying situation. On the one hand was Utamaro, apparently only temporarily paralyzed, and on the other was Tenaka, undoubtedly injured during his brief struggle with his uncle.

"I must get water" muttered Wick.

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He ran to the little room, and, snatching up a shallow pan, hurried to the well in the center of the court. To his joy and relief he saw a rope dangling in the opening. At the other end, only a dozen feet below, was a wooden pail.

It was the work of a minute to draw up a plentiful supply of water, and equipped with this Wick returned to the spot where Tenaka still slouched against the wall.

The Japanese boy's eyes were fluttering, and as Wick bathed his face he recovered consciousness. Starting up with a cry, he staggered against Wick and then sank back with a groan.

"It's my arm," he murmured. "I am afraid it is broken. Oh, how it hurts."

"Just lie still and I'll see what can be done," said Wick pityingly.

"But Uncle Sakae — where is he? Where — oh, friend, you must secure him before he recovers. Quick! he may revive soon. Get a rope or something. Quick! I am helpless now."

Wick ran to the well, and soon returned with a section of the stout cord he had used a few minutes previously. Several lessons in tying knots given him on board the Pacific Mail liner during the voyage stood him in good stead now. While Tenaka watched he skill-

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fully fastened Utamaro's hands behind him, and then tied the man's feet.

"Now wet his face and wrists," directed the Japanese boy.

The water had little effect. Utamaro groaned a great deal and seemed utterly prostrated. Wick could not see any marks of violence on him, and he knew that Tenaka had utilized one of the really remarkable feats only understood by the most expert students of jiu-jitsu.

"For a while, I thought I would fail," explained the Japanese boy. "He came at me so suddenly that it was nip and tuck. I finally managed to get my left hand upon a certain nerve center in the neck, and it worked all right. But his last struggle caught my forearm between his chin and shoulder, and when he fell it hurt my arm."

"Do you really think it is broken?" asked Wick. "Let me try it. Steady there—that's it—now bend a little this way—so-o! Ah, you can turn it, can't you?"

"Yes, but it hurts. Oh, how it hurts!"

Wick felt the arm as carefully as he could, then he stepped back.

"I guess you're elected, Tenaka," he said simply. "It will be necessary to get a doctor. Where is the nearest one?"

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The Japanese boy looked up at him with a wistful smile.

"Do you really mean it?" he asked.

"Mean what?"

"Aren't you going to run now that you have the chance? The gate is open, uncle can't prevent you, and I am laid out. The way is clear, friend. Aren't you going?"

Wick started. He glanced at the open gate, then at Utamaro, then he looked down at Tenaka.

The way was clear. No one could prevent him walking forth to freedom. All he had to do was to leave the old castle, find a boat down at the little landing, and row to the main shore. Once there, he felt that it would be an easy matter to retrace his steps along the mountain path to the railway station.

"Then I could get to Tokyo in a few hours and see father and Larry," he murmured. "See father and Larry again. And I could tell father what I have learned about the plot. But——"

He looked down at Tenaka. The boy's face gave eloquent testimony of the pain he was suffering. He required medical treatment without delay. To leave him alone with a crazy man, even if that man was bound hand and foot, would be cruel. It was quite possible

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that Utamaro, recovering, might break the rope in a frenzy—demented persons have abnormal strength—and then Tenaka's life would not be worth a moment's purchase.

Wick sighed.

"No, Tenaka," he said simply; "I'm not going away—just yet."

The Japanese boy turned his head away, his shoulders moved, and Wick caught the sound of a sob.

"You are the best ever," he said brokenly. "It will always be to my honor and pleasure and great advantage that I have known you."

"Quit your kidding," replied Wick cheerily. "Now tell me what to do. Where is the nearest doctor, and how can I reach him? But first let me bring out some mats and make you more comfortable."

When Wick returned with his bundle, he found Utamaro straining at the ropes and muttering in Japanese. It was evident from his expression that he was still under the spell.

"I think he will be out of it before night," said Tenaka. "He is asking where he is, and what happened."

"We'll have help before that, I hope," replied Wick.

Tenaka was silent for a moment, then he looked up and exclaimed in a tone of great relief:

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"I have it, friend. In the tower at the other end of the castle—the one with the barred window—is an old bell. It was used centuries ago to summon the daimios and their samurai from the mainland. If it is rung for some time, I think the farmers on the south shore will hear it and come over. But the wind must be in the right direction. It must blow from the north."

"Great scheme," exclaimed Wick, delighted. "Say, Tenaka, this is like a story book. If you were not suffering so much pain, and if I were here under different circumstances, I'd say this was just bully."

He bade Tenaka rest where he was, and then made the best of his way to the old tower. It was only after great effort and much scrambling over heaps of broken stone and other rubbish that he finally gained the top of the wall. Edging his way along he managed to reach the opening to the tower.

The old bell hung suspended from a stout metal beam, but the wreck of the tower had filled the interior to such an extent that the rim of the bell was partly buried. It required almost an hour's hard work to clear away the rubbish, but at last Wick stood back and saw with relief that the bell was entirely free.

There was no clapper; the bell had been made to ring from the outside. Picking up a fragment of stone,

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Wick threw it with all his power against the bronze side.

Boom!

The sound was startling. A covey of birds circling overhead darted upward with fluttering wings; from the crevices in the ruined tower scurried a myriad rats; then, before the echoes had died away, Wick smote the bell again.

Boom!

It was a deep, sonorous peal, unlike any sound Wick had heard. It seemed to rumble down the wind, and to spread its reverberant waves far and wide. It echoed back from the forest below, and rang through the nooks and crannies of the old feudal pile, and pealed out across the water as if the sound was never-ending.

Highly pleased with the result of his efforts, Wick hastened to the edge of the wall and looked down. Tenaka waved his uninjured arm and pointed upward. It was evident the wind was unfavorable. Apparently it came in fitful gusts from the west.

"I'll have to wait until it changes," muttered Wick as he descended to the court.

Tenaka greeted him with evident gratitude.

"You will not lose anything by this sacrifice," he said earnestly.

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"Oh, I'm not worrying about that," replied Wick with fine unconcern. "What I want just now is to make you more easy. How is your uncle?"

Tenaka glanced toward the spot where Utamaro still lay. The afflicted man had relapsed into unconsciousness or was deep in sleep. His eyes were half-open and the pupils stared unseeing.

"It will be some time before he fully recovers," explained the Japanese boy.

"Will he be rational then?"

"I don't know. It is probable he will, but then he might have another seizure immediately afterwards. I am afraid it will be necessary to have him confined, at least temporarily. We have no relatives nearer than Matsuyama, but some of uncle's friends will help us, I am sure."

"Don't you worry, Tenaka," exclaimed Wick emphatically. "My father has influence, and when I see him again I'll make sure that Mr. Utamaro is looked after. I have no hard feeling against him—since I met you. He thought he was doing his duty and, although we Western people don't look at duty in that light, conditions sometimes alter cases. I have it in for Mr. Girard and Mr. Beaumont—confound them!—and I'll bet my hat they will suffer for this affair."

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"I don't know that you can do very much," said Tenaka shrewdly. "I understand that diplomacy is a queer game, especially in the Orient. The main thing is not to get caught, and, even if you are caught, bluff it out. You will be able to leave here some time to-day, I am sure of it, and it won't be long before you rejoin your father, but you may not be through with Mr. Girard and Mr. Beaumont. Perhaps they have several cards up their sleeves."

A spasm of pain ended his words, and Wick reproached himself for permitting him to talk.

"There's one thing certain, Tenaka," he said decisively. "You must keep quiet until I get help from the mainland. If that wind doesn't change to our direction pretty soon, I'll take a boat and look for assistance."

"Please don't leave me alone," pleaded Tenaka. "I am not suffering very much. See! I can rest my arm on this mat. I am quite comfortable, and I can wait until the bell summons help."

The morning passed slowly. Several times Wick thought he saw a change in the direction of the wind, and he hastened to the old tower and sounded the bell, but without avail. At noon he prepared a light meal with provisions brought from the cottage, and he and Tenaka satisfied their hunger.

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During his visit outside the castle Wick found an opportunity to recover the paper he had concealed under the old urn in front of the cottage. The document might be valuable to him as one proof of the authenticity of the story he had to relate to his father, if for nothing else.

Utamaro still slept the sleep of utter exhaustion until the afternoon was far advanced; then he began to toss uneasily, and finally attempted to sit up. Wick was away at the moment, and when he returned he found Tenaka talking with his uncle.

He barely had time to realize that Utamaro gave unmistakable evidence of mental recovery when the Japanese boy cried:

"The wind! See, it's from the north, good and strong. Hurry, friend; it may change again at any moment."

Within a very few minutes the sonorous booming of the ancient bell again rang through the court. Wick had managed to find a short bar of iron, and with this he succeeded in creating an alarm that must have been heard for miles.

Just before the opposite shore became misty with the increasing haze of twilight he saw several men come down to the edge of the lake. They stood there for a

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minute or two, evidently discussing the unwonted pealing of the old bell, then two of them entered a boat and shoved off.

Wick lost no time in rejoining Tenaka.

"Help is coming at last," he said joyfully. "Some men are rowing toward the island."

Tenaka beckoned to him to step nearer.

"Now is your chance, friend," he said wistfully. "You must go at once. If you wait until those men get here, uncle may ask them to hold you. He is recovering rapidly. He asked me while you were gone if you knew that you could get away. He also told me to try to keep you. Go, my friend."

Wick could not help showing his joy. He had done his duty, and more, by this unfortunate lad. He recognized Tenaka's worth and his friendly disposition, but it was absolutely necessary to escape while the way was clear.

He bent over the Japanese boy and grasped his uninjured hand.

"Some day I'll see you again," he said simply. "You are a good fellow, Tenaka; you're—you're good enough to be an American. This trouble will blow over, and then you will come to Tokyo as my friend and guest. Good-by."

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Wick straightened up, to see Utamaro watching him. A faint halloa sounded outside the castle. A loud cry came from Utamaro—a cry in Japanese that had a note of warning in it.

“Go, friend,” exclaimed Tenaka. “Turn to the left when you leave the castle, and strike through the woods. Just back of the bell tower you will find a boat. Leave the island as quickly as you can. The darkness will favor you if anybody goes in pursuit.”

Wick barely heard the last few words. Another shout from outside, and an answering cry from Utamaro, sent him flying through the passageway. He gained the other side of the old moat and plunged into the forest of dwarf trees.

It was now almost dark, and the dense growth overhead made it difficult for him to see his way. As he stumbled along he heard a sound of breaking twigs behind him; then came hoarse shouts, and presently Utamaro's now familiar voice joined the chorus.

Wick had one chance in a hundred of finding the boat, but the chance came to him. He almost fell over the craft on reaching the water's edge. A slash with his knife and the rope fastening it to a stake was severed. Springing in, he shoved off and, using one oar as a scull, he contrived to get a dozen yards from land

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just as several men with Utamaro at their head rushed from the woods.

The Japanese was so disappointed and enraged that he was with difficulty prevented from leaping into the water after the boat.

Wick could not refrain from hurling back a taunt.

"Sayonara, Utamaro!" he shouted. "I am sorry I can't stay any longer, but I have important business elsewhere."

"You are not yet in Tokyo," retorted Utamaro. "We may meet again."

"Not if I see you first," muttered Wick.

He bent to the oars and, entirely ignorant of the proper direction in which to steer, plunged boldly into the thickening darkness.

CHAPTER XIX

LARRY LOCATES HIS MAN

LARRY RALSTON had plenty to occupy his thoughts as he rode along after the jinrikisha carrying Mr. Beaumont. When he left the legation that afternoon for a short sight-seeing trip around Tokyo, he did not think that he was about to be plunged into a most mysterious and extraordinary series of events.

During the past several days many disturbing and exciting incidents had occurred. First had come Wick's apparent loss from the Pacific Mail liner, with all that such a terrible tragedy would mean; then the melancholy landing at Yokohama and the subsequent journey to Tokyo; then the unexpected but mysterious telegram from Wick; and finally the arrival of Betty with his marvelous tale of plot and peril.

It will be recalled that Larry had lost no time in showing Wick's telegram to Mr. Ralston, and the diplomat had immediately communicated with the authorities asking them to find his son without delay. Such a re-

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quest from a personage of the United States Minister's importance meant instant action. Forty-eight hours had passed, however, and Wick had not been found.

His present task was not at all to Larry's liking. Thoroughly practical in thought and action, he felt that he was engaged in a fool's chase. He was sorely tempted to go straight to his uncle, Mr. Ralston, and tell him the whole story, but the fact that he had given his word to Betty deterred him.

The fat boy interested him aside from present connections. Larry felt that beneath Betty's careless, happy-go-lucky manner and his droll ways was a great deal of personal worth, and of personal shrewdness, too. Then, again, Betty's intense loyalty to Wick appealed to Larry. There could be no petty meanness in a lad capable of such loyalty.

"Betty wouldn't shine in society, and he has no education or training to speak of," thought Larry with a smile, "but he seems to be true gold. I only wish he had been sensible and had permitted me to tell Uncle George. Humph! here we are playing detective, with about as much chance of finding Wick as finding a needle in a haystack. Well, I have Betty's promise to release me from my word if we are not successful in discovering Wick's whereabouts by to-morrow afternoon."

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Mr. Beaumont's jinrikisha traversed the streets at a rapid pace. It was evident that he was in great haste, as Larry saw him lean forward and repeatedly urge his kurumaya.

"I don't know where he is going, but I am game to follow," murmured Larry.

He glanced back once as a corner was turned and saw Betty half a block behind. He failed to see another jinrikisha lurking in the shadows an equal distance behind Betty, and he would not have recognized the occupant—a tall, swarthy man in white linen and wearing a pith helmet—if he had seen him.

Larry—studious, wise beyond his years, and a lover of history—had commenced to enjoy the ride. The novel scenes surrounding him gradually drove the object of his quest from his mind. His thoughts reverted to the many interesting descriptions he had read of Tokyo.

One vivid chapter, which he had almost committed to memory from a most delightful book, "Jinrikisha Days in Japan," was suddenly recalled to him by several steam fire engines which appeared from a side street.

It was a fire company returning from one of the many battles with the flames which seem a part of the daily life in Tokyo. The men wore European uniforms, and were greeted with immense enthusiasm by the spec-

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tators. Larry recalled that less than ten years ago a modern fire engine was absolutely unknown in Japan. He also remembered the interesting description of fire fighting in the old days as given in the book:

"Fires are among the thrilling but picturesque experiences of city life, confined chiefly to the winter months. The annual losses of Japan through conflagrations are very great, and Tokyo has been practically destroyed many times. The flimsy little straw-matted, wooden houses are always ready to blaze; and if a lamp explodes, a brazier upsets, or a spark flies, the whole place is in flames, which leap from roof to roof until the quarter is kindled.

"The diminutive Japanese dwellings, of toylike construction, rest on corner posts set on large rocks, and made stable by their heavy roofs of mud and tiles. Fires are stemmed only by tearing down all buildings in the path of the flames, which is done as easily as a house of cards is overturned. A rope, fastened to one of the upright corner posts, brings the structure down with a crash, while the heavy roof covers it like an extinguisher. The ordinary city house or shop may have twelve feet of frontage, and even a second story seldom raises the roof more than fifteen feet from the ground. To hear of a thousand houses being burned in a night is appalling, but a thousand of these Lilliputian dwellings and their microscopic landscape gardens would not cover more area than two or three blocks of a foreign city.

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"Each section or ward has a high tower or ladder, with a long bell, and from this lookout the watchman gives the alarm or the near policeman sounds the fire bell. Pandemonium follows, for a more excitable being than the Japanese does not exist, and the fire bell's clang is suggestive of many sad and terrible experiences. Besides the municipal fire brigade, with their ladders and hand pumps, each ward maintains private watchmen and firemen. These watchmen roam their beats from dusk to daylight, jingling the loose iron rings on the tops of their long staffs. Throughout the night the watchman's clinking rings are heard at half-hour intervals, or oftener. The policemen, on the contrary, go about quietly, lurking in shadow to pounce upon malefactors; and foreigners, mistaking the fire guardian for the constable, have pointed many jokes at his noisy progress.

"When the alarm bell clangs, friends rush to help friends in saving their effects, and thieves make the most of the opportunity. Blocks away from the fire agitated people gather up mats, screens, bedding, clothing, and cooking utensils, and hurry from the neighborhood. Then does the simplicity of Japanese life justify itself.

"No cumbrous furniture is rolled out, to be broken in the transit; no tables, chairs, or clumsy beds are ruined in the saving. One small hand-cart holds the roll of wadded comforters and gowns that compose the bedding of the entire family, their clothing, and their few effects. The sliding paper screens are slipped from

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their grooves, the thick straw mats are taken from the floor, and the household departs, leaving but the roof, corner posts, and rough floor behind them. Processions of these refugees stream away from the burning quarter, and the heart of the spectator goes out to the poor people who, with so little, live so cheerfully and suffer so bravely.

"Sometimes carpenters begin to build new habitations on the still smoking ground, stepping gingerly among hot stones and tiles. The amazing quickness with which Japanese houses rise from their ashes defy comparison. In twelve hours after a conflagration the little shopkeepers will resume business at the old stand. Fire insurance is not suited to this country of wood and straw dwellings; but thatched roofs are giving way to tiles in the cities, and brick is more and more used in walls. Stone is too expensive and, in this earthquake country, open to greater objections than brick. The stone walls sometimes seen are a sham, the stones being thin slabs nailed on to the wooden framework of a house, like tiles or shingles, to rattle down in a harmless shower when the earth heaves and rocks."

The vivid recollection of this piquant description of fire fighting in Japan gave added zest to Larry's enjoyment of the passing engines, and he lost sight of Mr. Beaumont's jinrikisha for the moment. This is why he failed to see another jinrikisha dash violently into the thoroughfare from a side street and wheel alongside that occupied by Mr. Beaumont.

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The passenger in this vehicle was a tall, lean man with a dark face and a bristly iron-gray mustache—Mr. Girard, in fact. A five-yen inducement had enabled his kurumaya to rapidly encircle the short block unseen by Betty, who, like Larry, was engrossed in the engines.

"There's a pretty how-de-do, Beaumont," breathed Mr. Girard. "That fat whelp, the ship's-boy friend of young Ralston, the one we thought was aboard a junk well out at sea, has managed to escape. He is following you, and it's evident he's up to something."

Mr. Beaumont's ruddy face lost some of its color. He screwed his monocle onto his eye and glanced behind him in an agitated manner.

"You don't mean it, Girard," he said huskily. "By Jove! I—I don't believe——"

"It's true enough," interrupted Mr. Girard almost roughly. "He's back there in a jinrikisha, and he's following you all right."

"Something must be done. Perhaps he has seen Ralston already. By Jove! this is deuced unfortunate. And just when things were going so well for us."

"We must give the little fool the slip and go to some place where it's quiet and talk it over," advised Mr. Girard hurriedly. "Quick! there's no time to lose. Tell your kurumaya to mix in a crowd somewhere and

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then dash down a side street. I'll meet you at the Seiyō-ken."

Mr. Girard said something to his coolie and was soon lost to view. Mr. Beaumont also gave certain instructions to his kurumaya, with the result that when Larry turned his attention to the business in hand his quarry was nowhere in sight.

He stood up in his jinrikisha at the risk of toppling into the street, and glanced hopelessly at the crowds thronging the thoroughfare. To make matters worse, the sudden appearance of several newsmen crying the latest report from the seat of war brought the occupants of shop and dwelling into the open.

"Well, I have gone and done it now," exclaimed Larry in chagrin. "Like a blithering fool, I watched that procession instead of watching my man. And now what shall I do?"

He glanced back and saw Betty hugging the shadow on the opposite side of the street. A wave of his arm and the fat youth was at his side.

"I've lost him," explained Larry briefly. "He slipped out of sight while I wasn't looking. It's my fault, but there's no use crying. The question is, What shall we do now?"

"Bedaddle! you ought to be keelhauled," exclaimed

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Betty quaintly. "It'll be hard navigation now. Look at that mob of Japs all fighting to hear the news. I suppose some Japanese teakettle has sunk another job-lot of Roosian canal boats. Hear 'em howl!"

"There is one thing we can do," said Larry. "Mr. Beaumont may be stopping at a hotel instead of at the British Legation. I'll call up the different hotels—there are not many in town—and see. If we can't locate him that way we'll call at the legation."

"Good plan! When in doubt telephone, as they say back home."

It was an easy matter to find a central station. Larry tried the Hotel Metropole and was told that Mr. Beaumont was unknown there; then he called up the Imperial Hotel, locally known as the Teikoku.

"Beaumont?" said the small voice at the other end of the wire. "Yes; he has rooms here. The honorable gentleman is out just at present. Will you favor us with a message to be delivered?"

"No, I'll call later," replied Larry, hanging up the receiver. He turned to Betty with a smile, and added: "Now we've landed him for sure. Act second will soon be on the boards. Come on. I have a little plan which may work. It will surprise his honored presence anyway."

CHAPTER XX

"UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF MY COUSIN"

THE Imperial, or Teikoku, Hotel of Tokyo is a spacious and imposing stone structure situated advantageously within the first enclosure of the imperial palace grounds. It is the most important hotel in the capital, and is well patronized.

To this hotel Larry, accompanied by Betty, made his devious way. By previous arrangement, the stout boy remained in a secluded nook near the main entrance while Larry boldly confronted the clerk in attendance.

"I have a message for Mr. Beaumont from the United States Minister, Honorable George Ralston," he said authoritatively.

"Mr. Beaumont has not yet returned," replied the attendant respectfully.

"Then I will wait in his apartments," said Larry easily. "My message is extremely important, and I must not miss him."

He made the statement in fear and trembling. It

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was a desperate expedient, and Larry's heart almost stood still as the clerk hesitated, looked him over—and then rang a bell to summon an usher.

“By George! it's a good thing I am decently clad and can assume an air of respectability,” murmured the lame boy as he carelessly followed the attendant. “If it had been Betty—poor chap!—they would have thrown him into the street.”

Several minutes later Larry found himself in a nicely appointed apartment, one of several forming a suite fronting the main thoroughfare. There were easy chairs, a tea service upon a bamboo serving table, and near the window a quaint lacquered desk.

Slipping the attendant a yen piece, Larry threw himself into a chair and yawned.

“If Mr. Beaumont should stop in the office, please tell him a messenger is waiting in his rooms,” he said casually.

He waited until the door closed, then began an inspection of the room. He did not expect to find anything of interest, but was led by curiosity to see if the honored baronet had left anything connected with Wick lying around the apartment. The center table revealed only a book of Japanese photographs, an English-Japanese dictionary, and several copies of the London *Times*.

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Strolling over to the window, Larry glanced out and espied Betty leaning against a wall. The stout boy had pulled down the visor of his cap and turned up his collar. As Larry watched him for a moment he saw Betty peep out past the corner and then crouch back in his nook, repeating the action every few seconds.

Larry was compelled to laugh.

"He's having the time of his life," he said, turning away. "Well, if things turn out as I hope they will, he will have plenty of excitement."

Suddenly a heavy step sounded just outside the door.

"You say a messenger from the United States Legation is waiting for me?" rumbled a voice in the corridor. "Egad! I don't understand that—I don't expect——"

The door was flung open and a stout, ruddy-faced man in white linen, and wearing a single eyeglass, stepped into the room. For a moment the newcomer did not see the boy near the window; then, espying him, he strode forward.

"Do you want to see me?" he asked.

"I want to see Mr. Beaumont," quietly replied Larry.

"I am he."

Larry took one step toward the Englishman, then he asked sharply:

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"What have you done with Wickford Ralston?"

The effect of the question was rather disappointing to Larry. He saw Mr. Beaumont start, and his monocle dropped to the end of its cord, but the man's face remained impassive. It was evident the Englishman had wonderful control of his features.

"What have you done with Wickford Ralston?" repeated Larry with greater emphasis.

Mr. Beaumont slowly readjusted his glass, then scrutinizing his questioner, he said, with a drawl:

"What an extraordinary question. And who may he be, pray?"

Larry was clever enough to realize that he had a most difficult task before him. His attempt to startle this man had practically failed. It was clear that Mr. Beaumont was bringing into play all of his training, and that he could not be caught in an ordinary snare.

Larry deliberately seated himself.

"There is no need of wasting words, sir," he said coldly. "I am Wickford Ralston's cousin. My name is Lawrence Ralston, and the Honorable George Ralston, United States Minister to Japan, is my uncle. Wickford, as you know very well, is Mr. Ralston's son. Wickford has been missing since we reached this country, and I have reason to believe that you and your associate, Mr.

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Girard, have been instrumental in hiding him somewhere. No, don't interrupt me, sir. I know what I am talking about, and it will not do you any good to deny it. I want to know at once where Wickford is."

Mr. Beaumont's experience had covered more years than this youth had lived, and in all those years he had not met so cool a lad as this. Wickford had impressed him most favorably, but this youth seemed to have the knowledge and the consummate bearing of a man. The Englishman realized that he had a foëman worthy of his steel, and the thought almost disconcerted him.

After being warned that Betty was following him, Mr. Girard and he had met at the Japanese resort named by his colleague and had decided to try the effect of a bribe. They were prepared to pay Betty a sum of money for his silence which to that youth would seem a small fortune, and Mr. Girard at that moment was scouring the streets in search of the stout boy. This totally unexpected and new factor, Lawrence Ralston, complicated matters exceedingly.

Mr. Beaumont felt thoroughly alarmed as he stood facing the lame boy, but there was no trace of it in his voice or attitude. He smiled and twirled his glass, then said blandly:

"Egad! so you are Mr. Ralston's nephew. I have

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never had the pleasure of meeting your uncle, but I know him by reputation. He is an able diplomat, a fine gentleman, and a credit to your President, Mr. Roosevelt. I will be delighted to make his acquaintance."

Larry sat bolt upright, and did not vouchsafe a reply. His attitude was so uncompromising that Mr. Beaumont decided to try another course. He made several turns of the room, then, stopping in front of Larry, added rapidly:

"We will have no more fooling, young man. I will not deny or affirm that I know your cousin's present whereabouts. I choose to believe that you are either crazy or that you came to my apartments under false pretensions—probably to steal. You say that you have a message to me from Minister Ralston. You are not telling the truth. Your presence in this room is suspicious, to say the least." He stepped over to the wall near the door and laid his hand upon an electric button, adding in a matter-of-fact tone:

"I am about to summon the police and have you searched. I do not know if you have taken anything, but the precaution will be worth while. Now what—ah! you have something to say?"

His shrewd eyes had detected a most significant

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change of color in Larry's face. It was evident the chance shot had taken effect.

"You are playing a pretty good game, sir," finally admitted Larry, "and it's a desperate game, too. I am willing to discuss this affair frankly, if you wish, but you may as well understand that you can't frighten me with any threats. I will show my hand if you show yours. What do you say?"

The other eyed him furtively.

"Egad! you ought to enter your diplomatic corps, young man," he said. "I wish you were an English lad; I'd soon get you an under-secretaryship in our service. But talk away. Let me hear what you have to propose."

"Unconditional release of my cousin," replied Larry steadily.

Mr. Beaumont laughed.

"Indeed! Unconditional release, eh?" he said. "Admitting that we have your cousin hidden away, we are to release him and to permit you and him to tell your uncle any cock-and-bull story you may invent. That would be fine. You come here and insult me with your absurd insinuations, and I ought to throw you out of this room, neck and crop; but if Mr. Ralston's son has disappeared, I will do what I can to help find

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him. I have some influence with the Japanese Government, and there's no doubt that I will be able to restore young Ralston to his father."

"I haven't the least doubt of it," replied Larry dryly. "You have a condition; what is it?"

Mr. Beaumont had left the vicinity of the electric bell button. From where he now stood he could see the door leading into the corridor. He happened to glance toward it as Larry spoke, and saw it open suddenly. Mr. Girard stood in the opening, and back of him, cap in hand, was Betty.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. GIRARD'S DESPERATE PLAN, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

I SAY, Beaumont, I found the chap," called out Mr. Girard. "He was standing in front of the——"

A warning gesture from his confederate caused him to stop suddenly. He entered the room, closely followed by Betty, and glanced inquiringly at Larry.

"Girard, this is Mr. Lawrence Ralston, a nephew of Minister Ralston," introduced Mr. Beaumont hastily. "Mr. Ralston here has been entertaining me. I am glad you are in time to take part."

He closed the door and waved Betty to a chair, but the stout youth ignored the invitation and refused to be seated. It was evident Betty felt not only antagonistic, but also uncomfortable. Larry gave him a reassuring smile.

"I am sure I am glad to make Mr. Ralston's acquaintance," began Mr. Girard. He was interrupted by Mr. Beaumont, who said frankly:

"No time for ceremony. Ralston here accuses us

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of hiding away his cousin. That is preposterous, of course, but I have just told him that we have influence in Tokyo with the Government, and that we should be glad to help find the missing lad. In return for our assistance young Ralston will believe that certain scandalous assertions made by him are so ridiculous and absurd that nothing further will be said about them by his cousin, the boy called Betty, or by himself."

Larry looked at the speaker indignantly.

"So that is your condition?" he said quickly. "Well, I do not purpose to bind myself to any such thing. I am here to demand the release of my cousin, Wickford Ralston. I am told by Betty here that you and Mr. Girard said something in a railroad train indicating that a plot exists connected with my uncle, the United States Minister to Japan. Wick overheard you and, after entering your hotel at Yokohama, suddenly disappeared. You also tried to get rid of Betty by having him shanghaied on board a Chinese junk. Now, I have this to propose: If you will release Wick, or tell us where he can be found, I will promise that we shall do nothing more to unravel your plot other than to put all the information we now have in Mr. Ralston's hands. He can do what he pleases after that. What do you say?"

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The day had waned and the short twilight of Japan was rapidly filling the apartment with gloom. A fresh evening breeze came through the open windows, bringing the usual noises of a Tokyo street. A native masseur, plying his trade, could be heard blowing his wooden whistle of shrill sound; from an adjacent tea house the sweet tones of a samisen mingled with the notes of a koto; in the distance a military band blared incessantly the tidings of another victory.

For the space of a minute after Larry had voiced his ultimatum nothing was said in the room; then Mr. Girard, who had not seated himself, made an almost imperceptible signal to his confederate. It summoned a conference.

"Would you object if we talk over this extraordinary demand of yours in private?" he asked stiffly.

"Not at all," readily agreed Larry. "Shall we go into the corridor?"

"No, thank you; stay where you are."

"I want to know one thing," said Mr. Beaumont, as he prepared to follow his companion to the adjoining room; "what will you do if we refuse to consent?"

"Go straight to the United States Minister to Japan and tell him the whole story," promptly replied Larry. "And I might as well say right now, that if I had had

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my way, my uncle would have been told several hours ago, when I first knew of it."

When Mr. Girard carefully closed the door between the two rooms his face was not pleasant to look at. Rage, black and uncontrollable, disfigured his features. In an instant he had changed from a suave, even-tempered man to one consumed by the fiercest passions. For a minute he could not speak; then he stormed:

"There must be an end to trifling, and at once, Beaumont. If you think that I'll permit that cub out there to balk me now that we have the game in hand, you don't know me. I won't stand for it, and that's flat. There's too much at stake to lose the game now. And we've been too easy—a pair of soft-headed fools. Fancy letting a seventeen-year-old boy dictate to us! I'll show him."

His confederate had dropped into a chair, where he crouched with his head drooping in a dejected manner. It was evident that Mr. Beaumont felt thoroughly discouraged and alarmed.

"It's a bad business, a very bad business, Girard," he replied. "I would give all that I ever hope to get in this life if I had not embarked in the affair. Discovery spells ruin for me now, and disgrace too. Why did I ever listen to you?"

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Girard eyed him contemptuously.

"You do not need to ask me why," he sneered. "You know very well that it was the money you were after. But enough of this nonsense. We've got to get that Yankee cub out of the way. There's still a chance for us if we can keep his mouth shut. We've got his cousin safe where he can't talk, and now it is vitally necessary to dispose of this Lawrence Ralston and that ship's boy. I have a plan. It's weak, but it may work."

Mr. Beaumont raised his head, and there was fear in his eyes as he exclaimed protestingly:

"No violence, Girard. I swear I will not stand for violence. If you can get those boys out of the way without harming them, I'll do what I can to help, but I won't have violence."

"I am no fool," retorted the other roughly. "My plan is simple enough. I'll promise young Ralston to take him to where his cousin is staying on condition that he does not tell Minister Ralston until he has had a talk with his cousin. He may bite, and then I'll guarantee that neither he nor the boy Betty gets away from Utamaro's island until we are out of the country and safe. While I am taking them to Lake Hakone you must get in touch with Mr. Ralston. You have the documents and the game is up to you. Come on."

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Larry was still sitting near the table, apparently as cool and unconcerned as ever. Betty had not changed his attitude, but he did not appear so uncomfortable. It was evident that Larry's masterly handling of the situation appealed to him.

Mr. Girard lost no time in coming to the point.

"We have decided that you are too clever for us," he said, addressing Larry. "We will accept your terms, and will take you to your cousin, but we have one favor to ask."

Larry eyed the speaker suspiciously.

"What is it?"

"That you do not tell Minister Ralston anything until you have seen Wickford."

"Why?"

"I'll speak frankly," replied Mr. Girard, his voice showing deep humiliation. "We hope that Wickford will not be hard on us. We hope, in fact, that he will give us an opportunity to retrieve ourselves, and perhaps may speak a good word to his father for us."

"Yes, Wickford is a good, kind-hearted lad," chimed in Mr. Beaumont. "He will remember that I gave him work before we knew who he was, and when we thought he was a lad without friends in a foreign country."

"Then it's all true?" said Larry slowly. "You have

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been plotting against Mr. Ralston, and you have kidnaped his son?"

"That's a harsh word, young man," said Mr. Girard. "We engaged your cousin and sent him to a certain place to do some copying work for us. You can't say that we kidnaped him, don't you know."

"That's exactly what it is," replied Larry warmly. "And at home you would get years at hard labor in a prison for doing it. I don't know whether I care to treat with you or not. You wish me to leave it to Wickford. Why should I? In my opinion the best thing I can do is to go straight from here to my uncle."

"Bedaddle, I have something to say about that!" spoke up Betty. "You know what you promised me, Larry Ralston. You said that you would not tell your uncle until I said you could, or anyway not before tomorrow afternoon, and only then in case we've not found Wick. You know more about things than I do, and you're a heap smarter than me, but Wick made me promise to keep this affair from his dad, and I'm going to do as he asked, so there."

The two men blessed the stout boy under their breaths. Betty's intervention was providential. Larry felt extremely vexed, but he knew that Betty spoke the

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truth. The one thing left was to accept every statement with caution, and to be prepared for treachery.

"I am doing this against my better judgment," Larry said finally. "But as Betty insists, I'll agree to go with you to the place you have hidden Wickford. I want to say, however, that at the first sign of trouble or double-dealing, I'll go to my uncle."

Mr. Girard shrugged his shoulders.

"You needn't worry," he said. "Nothing will happen. Now, I suppose you wish to notify your uncle that you will not be home to-night. We will leave in an hour or two and should reach our destination about daylight, or a little later. There are pen and paper on the table. Write your uncle, and I'll have a messenger deliver it at the legation."

While Larry was penning the brief note, Mr. Girard drew his confederate aside and managed to whisper.

"I have made up my mind not to try any half measures. You can wager your last shilling that our two cubs here will not come back until we are ready—that is, if I can get them where Utamaro and I can tackle them without observation."

"I am against any violence," replied Mr. Beaumont, "but, as you say, we are desperate. Good luck!"

He bade the boys good-by with great cordiality, then

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left the hotel. Shortly after midnight Mr. Girard, accompanied by Larry and Betty, took a train for Yokohama, and from there to the small station where Wick and Mr. Girard had commenced their trip over the rough hills to the lake.

During this part of the journey there was little interchange of words between Larry and the Englishman. The lame boy made no attempt to conceal his contempt of the "kidnapers," as he termed Mr. Girard, and it was evident the latter found it difficult even to pretend a friendly feeling.

Betty and Larry spent the time alternately sleeping and exchanging confidences. The latter heard a deal of the stout boy's history, and his liking for Betty increased materially. The friendship was mutual, as Betty felt more than ever convinced that Wick was justified in his praise of his cousin.

A disappointment awaited Mr. Girard in the little village. After partaking of breakfast at the inn where he and Wick had broken their fast two days before, he made inquiries for a guide to the lake. As it happened, a matsuri or festival at an adjacent town had practically depopulated the village for the time being.

"We can't make the trip alone," explained Mr. Girard to the boys, "so we'll have to wait. The inn man

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tells me some one is sure to return by ten or eleven. Until then we will rest."

It was long past the hour, in fact noon was at hand when one of the villagers straggled in. Mr. Girard immediately engaged him to guide the party to the lake. Kagos had been provided, and the Englishman was about to give the signal to start when the station agent, who, like the majority of railway employees in Japan, spoke fairly good English, came running up with a paper.

"I look for Hon. Mr. Girard," he announced importantly. "I hev the telegraph for him."

Mr. Girard almost snatched the paper from the man's hand. He read the message at a glance, and then Larry and Betty, who were watching him curiously, saw his face blanch and then redden again.

"Bedaddle! he's heard bad news, I'll bet a cooky," whispered Betty. "He was white a second ago, and now he looks like the starboard comb of a turkey——"

"Sh-h!" warned Larry. "Something's up."

Without a glance in their direction, Mr. Girard strode to the railway station and disappeared inside. A few minutes later a shrill whistle from the south indicated the approach of a train.

As it slowed down at the platform the boys, who were watching closely, saw Mr. Girard rush out and

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enter one of the carriages. Larry caught Betty by the arm.

"Quick! After him!" he shouted. "He's trying to give us the slip. Help me, please. Hurry, or he'll get away from us!"

With Betty at his side, Larry limped to the door of the English-built carriage. The knob moved in his hand and he entered with the stout boy closely following. Mr. Girard was the only occupant, and he turned with a snarl as the lads piled in.

"What does this mean?" demanded Larry boldly. "Are you trying to leave us? Is this why you brought us from Tokyo?"

"Get out of here!" shouted Girard, grasping Larry by the collar. "I am through with you—I'm through with the whole affair. You and your cousin and your Yankee uncle can go rot for all I care. Leave this carriage or I'll throw you out."

The infuriated man forced Larry backward so violently that he fell against Betty, who at that moment attempted to reach past the lame boy and attack their foe. There was a brief struggle, the train gave a sudden lurch as it began to move ahead, and, fighting desperately to save themselves, Larry and Betty tumbled through the open door to the station platform.

CHAPTER XXII

WICK'S NIGHT ON THE LAKE

WHEN Wickford rowed into the darkness of the lake after his hurried escape from the island, his thoughts were in a tumult. He was highly elated at getting out of Utamaro's clutches, and the fact that he was in a fair way to see his father and Larry before many hours pleased him mightily, but with it all he was conscious of a feeling of regret.

There is a peculiar bond of sympathy between boys which seldom has its counterpart in those of greater age. It is imperfectly expressed by the word "chum." It is a mutual attraction which knows no reason or purpose.

Wickford knew that Tenaka was of an alien race, and that he had been indirectly connected with his imprisonment on the island, but he liked the Japanese boy and really regretted leaving him. It was with a mental resolution to have Tenaka come to Tokyo in time that Wickford pulled steadily on into the darkness.

He had no idea of direction and no plan except to get as far away from the island as possible. Utamaro's

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threat still rang in his ears. He knew that other boats were moored at the little landing, and that a pursuit would undoubtedly be attempted.

After rowing for probably ten minutes, he rested upon his oars and listened. The wind had increased in force, and the sky was overcast. Wick realized from the restless tossing of the boat that the surface of the lake had become choppy, and would probably grow rough as the night progressed.

As the boy looked about him a twinkling light became visible on the right, then he noticed another light ahead, and then another. They were faint and evidently at some distance. He turned on the seat and saw a cluster of sparkling points elevated above the lake. They were arranged in rows and looked for all the world like the lights seen in the upper floors of a New York skyscraper, but not nearly so high.

It was a building of some kind, and not so very far away. While Wick watched the illumined specks, he suddenly heard voices in the gloom astern. The words were distinct, but he could not understand their meaning. Several persons were talking in Japanese.

Then a sudden gust of wind brought the sound of another voice. It was Utamaro's!

For a brief moment Wick was panic-stricken. He

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glanced wildly about and rose to his feet as if contemplating a plunge into the water, then he crouched back in the boat and seized the oars, again reassured by the fact that the darkness was an effective aid.

The feeling was shortlived, however. Before the boy could take more than half a dozen strokes the blackness was rent by a sudden flare, and he saw, not fifty yards away and clearly outlined in the ruddy glare of a torch, a rowboat containing three men.

He was seen at the same instant. A triumphant shout came to his ears, then two of the men in the pursuing craft fell to their oars while the third steered and held the torch.

The spectacle was to Wick as a spur to a fiery horse. All the resolution and determination in his nature rose to the test. The possibility of losing the freedom so recently won caused him to bend to the oars as he had never rowed before. Fortunately his boat was light, merely a skiff in fact, and he sent it spinning through the water at a much greater speed than the two men did their heavier and more clumsy craft.

It was not long before Utamaro saw that he was dropping behind. The discovery enraged him, and he leaned forward to bid his companions row faster. As he did so he lost his balance and dropped the torch.

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Darkness, very welcome to Wick, closed down on the scene.

He did not cease rowing, however, but kept at it until fatigue overcame him. He did not know how far he had rowed, or in which direction. All he realized was that he was completely fagged out and barely able to unship the oars. Lying back in the boat with his head upon the seat in the stern, he allowed his muscles to relax in a blissful period of absolute rest.

The increasing waves tossed the frail craft hither and thither, and at times the water lapped over the sides wetting the boy, but he did not stir or take cognizance of his surroundings for at least a half hour. Then he rose and found that his energies and alertness were again at his command.

It was a strange and most unusual experience for an American boy, and Wick appreciated the fact. Tossing idly about in a native skiff upon the bosom of a lake in the interior of Japan, a fugitive just escaped from an enforced imprisonment upon an island, it was little wonder that Wick felt that it must be a dream.

"I'll wake up presently and find dear old dad knocking at the door and Larry shouting that it's time for school," he murmured wistfully. "Pshaw! there haven't been any submarine boats and Russian cruisers, and Eng-

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lish diplomats talking plots in railroad trains, or any kidnapping and old castles and crazy Japanese."

The chill winds of night blowing upon his water-soaked garments brought a realization of his situation. It was no dream, but a stern reality, and Wick knew that he must make the best of his way to the shore. An incident mentioned in a favorite book returned to him, and he proceeded forthwith to emulate the act of precaution performed by the hero of the story. Removing his jacket he ripped the sleeves from his shirt, then bound the strips of linen around the oars where they worked in the rowlocks. Thus muffled, the oars sent forth no sound.

Some of the lights previously noticed had disappeared, but the rows of twinkling points, evidently located in some important building or group of buildings, still remained.

Wick discussed the situation with himself.

"If I row in that direction, I may fall into the hands of some Japanese who do not understand English," he mused, poising his oars. "They may have me arrested as a suspicious person, especially as these are war times, and goodness knows when I shall get away. Then again, if I row about the lake I may run into Utamaro, and the jig surely will be up. But I can't stay out here. The

wind is rising, and this lake is large enough for a very ugly sea to chop up. It's cold, too. What on earth shall I do?"

A heavier sea than usual pounded against the bow of the light skiff, sending spray completely over him, then a recurring wave lapped over the low freeboard, and Wick found it necessary to bale for his very life. This alarmed him, and he took up the oars in a hurry.

Every few minutes he ceased rowing and listened, and in this way he passed the next half hour. His general direction was toward the row of lights, but without anything particular to guide him he did not maintain a very straight course. After a while he glanced ahead and found to his surprise that some object very like a grove of trees had come between him and the lights, then suddenly the bow of the skiff grated upon the shore of a rocky bit of land.

By this time Wick's eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and he was able to distinguish the outlines of a little landing place almost within a dozen feet. Just as he was about to stand up and reconnoiter he noticed a faint light which seemed to swing back and forth as if from a lantern in the hand of some one rapidly approaching the landing.

Wick barely had time to crouch down behind the

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gunwale when several men emerged from the woods and halted at the edge of the little wharf. A guttural voice said something in Japanese, and then another voice replied.

Wick's heart leaped into his throat. The latter voice was entirely familiar to him. The speaker was Tenaka!

"By gracious, I have done it now!" groaned poor Wick. "I have returned to Utamaro's island!"

The explanation of his present predicament was simple enough. In pulling about the lake he had gradually made a complete circle and returned almost to the same spot he had left. The mistake arose from the fact that the average boy or man is stronger in the right arm than in the left, and greater force is exerted by the right arm in rowing or in swimming.

One idea was paramount in Wick's thoughts as he crouched in the bottom of the skiff, and that was to remain absolutely quiet and motionless. The slightest sound would attract the attention of Tenaka and his companions and would lead to his undoing. If the Japanese boy had been alone, Wick would not have hesitated to address him. He felt entirely satisfied that Tenaka's friendship and aid were assured.

It seemed to the boy crouched in a most tiresome attitude in the boat, that the Japanese would never leave

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the landing. They held up the lantern and looked here and there as if in search of something, and talked volubly the while.

Finally Tenaka said something in an emphatic tone, and the group moved slowly away toward the cottage which Wick knew was only a short distance from the landing.

Wick waited a while, then with a deep sigh of relief and a feeling of thankfulness rose and stretched his arms. Then cautiously shoving off from the land he again bent to his oars. Giving the island a wide berth he rowed steadily up the lake in the direction of the twinkling lights.

By this time Wick felt not only physically fatigued, but weary of his predicament. He had been on the lake fully three hours; he was wet and cold, and thoroughly uncomfortable. Only the sharp edge of danger and the eager desire to reach Tokyo kept up his spirits.

Satisfied that his best plan was to land on the main shore in some secluded spot, there to await the coming of daylight, he pulled methodically along until at last the skiff touched shore at a spot where a thicket of tall rushes gave promise of a secure hiding place.

Stealthily fastening the painter to a branch extending from a fallen tree trunk, Wick settled down for a

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long and dreary wait. The light boat rocking gently in the water finally caused him to doze, and he slept fitfully until a gradual brightening of the eastern sky proclaimed the coming of day.

Wick's first thought was of his pursuers. When the darkness had completely vanished, he stood up and parted the rushes astern of the skiff. The lake stretched for several miles toward the north, and in the gray morning light it seemed like a beautiful opal set in a band of green. In the distance, probably two miles away, was a small island covered with dwarf trees. A grayish mass almost in the center identified it as Uta-maro's home.

There was no sign of life on the island, but in the middle distance were several boats. Wick watched them until at last he saw nets cast overboard, and he knew the occupants were industrious fishermen alert for an early catch.

The surrounding mountains seemed to rise directly from the lake except at the spot where he had taken shelter. There a level stretch of land extended some distance from the shore, and scattered about this valley were a number of quaint Japanese farmhouses. Wick could not make out the building outlined by the rows of lights seen by him during the night, and he realized

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with a start that it must be situated not far from his hiding place.

The discovery made him uncomfortable—why he hardly knew—and he hesitated to leave the sheltering clump of rushes. The sun, coming up above the low-lying hills to the east, beamed gratefully upon him, and finally, driven to action by the knowledge that he must make a venture, he left the skiff and forced his way through a fringe of bushes bordering the lake.

After walking a hundred yards he suddenly came upon a graveled path which showed evidence of care. Beyond the path was a stretch of green sward, and beyond that an extensive flower bed a-bloom with cultivated plants.

“Cricky! this must be a gentleman's estate,” murmured the boy. “I wonder if it belongs to the prince mentioned by Mr. Girard. Perhaps he——”

Wick's voice died in his throat, and he made a quick step backward as a man came past a turn in the path and confronted him. The boy was too late, however, and he remained motionless on the edge of the path.

CHAPTER XXIII

WICK MAKES A POWERFUL FRIEND

THE newcomer was evidently a Japanese, but there was an indescribable air of dignity in his bearing. His head was large and his features grave but pleasant, and he carried himself with an air of authority so unmistakable that Wick instinctively felt that this indeed must be a nobleman of high rank.

On first catching sight of Wick the Japanese half raised one hand to his lips as if about to blow a silver whistle suspended from his neck by a chain, but he evidently thought better of it and called out in Japanese, as if demanding the reason for the boy's presence.

The attitude of the man was so unassuming and his expression so very kindly that Wick plucked up his spirits and stepped toward him.

"I do not speak Japanese," he said apologetically. "If you understand English, I'll be glad to explain how I happened to enter your grounds. Do you know what I am saying, sir?"

The Japanese nodded slowly, and something very like

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a smile crept about the corners of his mouth. Wick was delighted, and he lost no time in continuing.

"I want to get to Tokyo, sir," he said earnestly. "I—I was on the lake all night, and I am pretty cold and tired, sir. Will you please be kind enough to tell me where I can find a railway station near here?"

The stranger nodded and smiled again. Then he pointed toward the right, as if to indicate that the station could be found in that direction.

"English boy?" he asked.

These were the first words he had spoken. His voice was low and modulated, and he asked the question hesitatingly, as if unused to the language.

Wick shook his head with energy.

"No, sir, I'm not English," he replied; "I'm an American. I have never even been to England. My father is—is—" He hesitated. Would it be wise to disclose his identity? Perhaps this man knew Mr. Girard or Utamaro? The thought was hardly formed before Wick rejected it as entirely impossible. No; this man was of the highest class, and his very air kindliness itself.

Wick was seized with one of his sudden impulses. The long strain under which he had suffered and the personality of this lordly Japanese, which seemed to in-

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vite confidence, were too much for him. Cold and we from his long vigil on the lake, hungry and exhausted he felt miserable enough to welcome the friendship of almost anyone.

"My father is Mr. George Ralston, the United States Minister to Japan," he burst out. "We got here last Tuesday. I—I fell overboard from the steamer and was picked up by a submarine belonging to this country. When I got ashore I overheard a plot against my father, and in trying to learn more about it I was brought to an island on this lake under false pretenses and held there against my will. I got away last night and—and landed here in a skiff. Now, sir, I do want to get to Tokyo at once so I can tell my father about the——"

Wick stopped suddenly and backed away in alarm. Two Japanese in gorgeous military uniforms had emerged from the bushes and were advancing toward him, drawing their swords in a threatening manner. Before they had taken more than a dozen steps the Japanese nobleman, for such Wick considered him, said something in an authoritative tone, and the officers drew themselves up and saluted respectfully.

Their humble attitude and the manner in which they regarded the grave Japanese convinced Wick that he

WICK MAKES A POWERFUL FRIEND

had been talking to a nobleman of exalted rank, and he felt somewhat abashed.

"I'll bet a cooky he's the prince, after all," he murmured to himself. "He certainly looks like a prince, and he acts like one, too."

The nobleman beckoned to the younger of the two officers, a man hardly out of his teens, and who had an intelligent and pleasant face. As the youthful officer approached he made a profound obeisance, which was promptly checked by a word from the tall Japanese. The latter spoke rapidly to him for a moment, and from the frequent glances they gave him, Wick knew that he was the object of their conversation.

Then the young officer bade Wick approach.

"I speak English," he said kindly. "His—that is—the gentleman here does not speak it well, although he understands what you say. He has asked me to interpret for him, and he wishes you to tell him your entire story."

"I will be glad to do so," frankly replied Wick. He added, with natural curiosity, "He is a great Japanese nobleman, is he not?"

The young officer smiled.

"Yes," he replied, with a side glance at the tall Japanese, "he is a very great nobleman."

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lish diplomats talking plots in railroad trains, or any kidnapping and old castles and crazy Japanese."

The chill winds of night blowing upon his water-soaked garments brought a realization of his situation. It was no dream, but a stern reality, and Wick knew that he must make the best of his way to the shore. An incident mentioned in a favorite book returned to him, and he proceeded forthwith to emulate the act of precaution performed by the hero of the story. Removing his jacket he ripped the sleeves from his shirt, then bound the strips of linen around the oars where they worked in the rowlocks. Thus muffled, the oars sent forth no sound.

Some of the lights previously noticed had disappeared, but the rows of twinkling points, evidently located in some important building or group of buildings, still remained.

Wick discussed the situation with himself.

"If I row in that direction, I may fall into the hands of some Japanese who do not understand English," he mused, poising his oars. "They may have me arrested as a suspicious person, especially as these are war times, and goodness knows when I shall get away. Then again, if I row about the lake I may run into Utamaro, and the jig surely will be up. But I can't stay out here. The

WICK'S NIGHT ON THE LAKE

wind is rising, and this lake is large enough for a very ugly sea to chop up. It's cold, too. What on earth shall I do?"

A heavier sea than usual pounded against the bow of the light skiff, sending spray completely over him, then a recurring wave lapped over the low freeboard, and Wick found it necessary to bale for his very life. This alarmed him, and he took up the oars in a hurry.

Every few minutes he ceased rowing and listened, and in this way he passed the next half hour. His general direction was toward the row of lights, but without anything particular to guide him he did not maintain a very straight course. After a while he glanced ahead and found to his surprise that some object very like a grove of trees had come between him and the lights, then suddenly the bow of the skiff grated upon the shore of a rocky bit of land.

By this time Wick's eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and he was able to distinguish the outlines of a little landing place almost within a dozen feet. Just as he was about to stand up and reconnoiter he noticed a faint light which seemed to swing back and forth as if from a lantern in the hand of some one rapidly approaching the landing.

Wick barely had time to crouch down behind the

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CHAPTER XXIV

HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR OF JAPAN

THREE very happy boys and a sympathetic Japanese army officer occupied the special compartment of that particular train as it rolled away on its journey toward Tokyo. Wick was so overjoyed at the unexpected meeting that he hardly could contain himself, and Larry was equally happy, and immensely relieved in the bargain.

As for Betty! The fat youth cheered so loud and made such a noisy demonstration that Wick threatened to throw him from the train.

"Bedaddle!" said Betty with a giggle, "Larry here won't let you do it. We are chums now, and don't you forget it."

Captain Komatsu entered into the spirit of the reunion with boyish abandon, and for the next half hour everybody talked at once. Wick finally succeeded in describing his adventures since leaving Betty at the Grand Hotel, then the stout boy told his story, and finally Larry completed the narration.

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"It's all up with the plotters now," he said gravely. "They have reached the end of their rope. Mr. Girard undoubtedly received a telegram from his confederate, who probably heard by wire from Utamaro that you had escaped. Mr. Girard will reach Tokyo on the train ahead of us, and he'll have an opportunity to get away."

"Pardon me," said Captain Komatsu grimly, "but I don't think he will. Instructions have already gone to Tokyo to see that both men are arrested and held for certain investigations ordered by the proper authorities."

Wick looked at the young Japanese in surprise.

"Is that so?" he asked. "Then the nobleman—the gentleman I met this morning is able to give such orders?"

Captain Komatsu's expressive eyes twinkled, and he concealed a smile behind his gloved hand.

"I may venture to say that you have several little surprises awaiting you at Tokyo," he said.

"I don't doubt that," replied Wick ruefully. "I guess my father will preside at the principal surprise. Cricky! I'd lam a boy of mine good and plenty if he made as big a fool of himself as I did."

"I don't agree with you now," put in Larry. "I thought you had made a mistake when I first heard

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about it, but I hardly see what you could have done other than try to follow those two men. The talk you overheard in the train really amounted to nothing as a clue. Of course it would have put Uncle George on his guard, but those men wouldn't acknowledge anything."

"I know Wick acted right," exclaimed Betty. "The only time he fell down was when he gave me the shake. Now if I had been with him we could have licked the stuffin' out of that crazy Jap and shoo'd the Englishmen off the map."

"As you say in English," smiled Captain Komatsu, "all's well that ends well. Wait until we reach Tokyo, then you'll see something happen."

To Wick the train seemed to drag along. In time, however, Yokohama was reached, and then, an hour later, the cars rolled into the Shimbashi station of Tokyo. A mounted orderly met Captain Komatsu as he left the train and gave him a message. The Japanese officer turned to Wick and held out his hand.

"I regret that it is necessary for me to leave you now," he said. "A little later, perhaps this evening, and maybe not until to-morrow morning, you will see me again. In the meantime I would advise you to go direct to the United States Legation."

HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR OF JAPAN

"I'll surely do that," replied Wick. He added, as the young captain hurried to a carriage awaiting him:

"That's a fine Japanese. He's like poor Tenaka. I do hope we'll see him again."

"If you ask me, that chap has something up his sleeve!" exclaimed Betty. "I saw him smiling to himself more than once. Well, we'll wait for the fireworks. Here's some jinrikishas."

Larry and Betty tacitly permitted Wick to enter the legation alone. They felt instinctively that he would prefer not to have witnesses to the interview with his father.

"Do you think the old man—I mean his dad—will lick him?" asked Betty in concern.

"It is evident you do not know Uncle George," laughed Larry. "There's only one best uncle on earth, and he's talking to Wick now."

Within ten minutes one of the Ralston attendants informed the boys their presence was desired in the honorable minister's private office. They found Wick and his father in a very happy mood. It was evident that Mr. Ralston was so delighted at getting his boy again, and so thankful for his safe deliverance from peril, that he was entirely satisfied to forgive any minor error of judgment.

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Mr. Ralston's greeting of Betty caused that ingenuous youth to stammer and redden, and to appear most uncomfortable. He seemed greatly in awe of Wick's father, and apparently considered him as exalted a personage as President Roosevelt.

"Wickford has told me the whole story," said Mr. Ralston, resuming the discussion. "It is hardly necessary for me to say that it is the most remarkable affair I have known during my entire diplomatic experience. That it is an amazing plot, with diplomatic and international connections, cannot be doubted. There seems no question either that it involved an attempt to get a large sum of money from me. The man calling himself Girard is unknown to me, but I am acquainted with, or at least I have met, Beaumont. I understand he is an under-secretary of the British Embassy, and I have a faint recollection that he was mixed up with a continental scandal several years ago. He is of good family, but his character is weak. Poor fellow! This affair will ruin him if it assumes the proportions I think it will."

"Mr. Girard seems to be the leader in the plot, whatever it is," said Wick thoughtfully. "You know I heard him tell Mr. Beaumont something about five thousand pounds in addition to something else, all of

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which was to go to Mr. Beaumont. The question is, What was Mr. Girard to get out of it?"

"We will soon know," replied his father, glancing at his watch. "I expect word any minute from the authorities. Mr. Beaumont is in custody at the British Embassy, and his confederate is being held at police headquarters. Ah! there's a messenger now."

Wick, who had risen to his feet and was searching through his blouse, suddenly produced a stained piece of paper.

"Wait a minute, father," he exclaimed. "I totally forgot this document. It belongs to Mr. Girard. I picked it up in the road after he almost fell over the cliff. Perhaps it may explain something. It's in cipher, I think."

Mr. Ralston took the paper with him as he left the building in obedience to a summons from the authorities. He was gone several hours, and when he returned the boys saw at once from his expression of sternness that he had learned something of extreme importance. He immediately announced a conference with his staff.

"Well, the affair is up to the higher powers," commented Wick. "I'll bet a round dollar the cables to Washington will be red-hot for the next dozen hours."

"Will they hang old Beaumont and Girard?" asked

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Betty. "Bedaddle! if they do, and it's public, I want to see it."

"They don't hang diplomats for crookedness," replied Wick. "When a diplomat makes a bad break his Government gives him a sly kick and announces his resignation. That is about what will happen to Mr. Beaumont. I don't know about Girard."

"But what about their kidnaping you?" insisted the stout boy. "Won't they get the stone pile for that?"

"I don't think so. That would mean a criminal trial and much scandal. The governments concerned will settle it and the thing will be dropped. You see if that doesn't happen."

It was well toward evening before the conference in Mr. Ralston's office came to an end. Then, just before dusk, the official legation carriage drew up before the building, and the American Minister, accompanied by his secretaries, entered and was driven off in state. Mr. Ralston informed Wick before leaving that his destination was the British Embassy, adding:

"We have been summoned to a conference. I prefer not to tell you just what has been revealed before the affair is entirely settled, but I can say that it is a most extraordinary plot. You will be greatly surprised."

The boys remained up until the minister and his

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secretaries returned, but Mr. Ralston, who seemed reserved and fatigued, postponed the promised explanation until the following morning.

While at breakfast with Larry and Betty, Wick was summoned to his father's office. He found the diplomat poring over a number of official documents, among which was the paper belonging to Mr. Girard. To it was attached another paper, evidently containing a translation. Just as Mr. Ralston greeted his son, an attendant announced a messenger from the palace.

A stern-looking Japanese in uniform entered the room and gave the minister a note, which the latter read with every indication of profound surprise. After hastily penning a reply, which the court messenger took with a profound bow, and left, Mr. Ralston turned to his son.

"Wickford," he said hastily, "I have had some interesting experiences in public life, but I think this plot and the summons I have just received are more astonishing than anything that ever happened to me. Last night I asked the emperor to grant me a private audience this morning connected with the Beaumont-Girard affair. His Majesty has consented, but——"

He hesitated and thrummed upon the desk with his fingers.

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"That is nothing unusual, is it?" asked Wick respectfully.

"No, but the note brought by that messenger adds that I am to bring you with me. You are included in the summons."

"The emperor wants to see me?" cried Wick in profound amazement. "Why, father, there must be some mistake. Surely, he would have nothing to say to me. It isn't customary——"

"It is so unusual that I believe it forms a precedent. Perhaps he has heard of your remarkable rescue. The mystery will be cleared up very soon. Go, now, and get ready. The palace carriage will soon be here."

"I know what it is," said Wick to Larry and Betty as he changed his clothing. "I'll wager my hat that the emperor has been told about me by that prince I met on Lake Hakone. Cricky! don't you wish you were me? Think of meeting the Mikado of Japan in his own backyard. I wonder if there will be a moving-picture machine in the vicinity?"

"Bedaddle! here's a whole army outside," exclaimed Betty from the window. "Say, fellows, look at the soldiers on horseback, and gee! what a swell carriage!"

"It's for me," replied Wick complacently. "That's

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the way emperors send for you when they want to have a talk."

"There'll be no living with you after this," laughed Larry. "And when we get back home in Indiana the dime museums will be offering you long engagements as the freak who saw the Mikado and lived."

Wick fled from this banter, and presently entered the palace carriage with his father. A squadron of the house cavalry had been sent as a mark of honor, and the lad thoroughly enjoyed the sensation. He sat very proud and dignified by his father's side; the one thing lacking to his happiness was the presence of Larry and Betty.

After a short drive the Nijubashi, or entrance to the palace, was reached. Driving over a masonry bridge crossing a broad moat, the state carriage rolled into the beautiful grounds surrounding the costly building occupied by the Mikado of modern Japan. There were so many things to see that Wick felt confused. He knew there were two drawbridges and two ponderous old towers at the gateways, and he saw a large yellow structure, very like a French château, which seemed to form the front wing of a long, rambling building. He also instinctively noted the wonderful carved woodwork and graceful tiled roofs of other buildings in the group,

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then the carriage swept up to an imposing entrance, and several officials in gorgeous uniforms helped him to descend with his father.

One of the officials cordially greeted the United States Minister and led the way through a vast corridor to a room which seemed, with its coffered ceiling, richly lacquered furniture, and gold-decorated walls, to be the most sumptuous apartment he had ever seen.

A little man clad in black, who proved to be the interpreter, entered and took a position near a sliding screen fronting a door. Then a young army officer came in from another apartment and advanced toward Wick with a smile of welcome. It was Captain Komatsu.

Before Wick could do more than shake hands with him, a sonorous voice behind the screen made an announcement. Then the screen itself was moved aside and a stately Japanese in a field marshal's uniform stepped toward the waiting group. Wick gasped and stared in profound amazement.

It was His Majesty the Emperor of Japan—his nobleman of the lake!

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

WHAT followed was very confusing and unreal to Wick. He stared with all his eyes at the emperor, and Mr. Ralston was compelled to nudge him before he realized that it was time to make the three profound bows usual in court etiquette.

The kindly smile and pleasant expression of the Mikado finally reassured the lad, and after gulping once or twice he regained a part of his ordinary composure.

The emperor advanced to where the United States Minister and his son stood and frankly offered his hand. It was such an unprecedented mark of favor that Wick saw Captain Komatsu lift his eyebrows in amazement. Some time later the boy learned that royalty in Japan is so regal that it is considered a crime to touch His Majesty's person. In the old days before the Restoration, when Japan was ruled by a Shogun, or usurper,

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the Mikado was considered a god, and even in writing his name his people were not permitted to complete the entire word. He was never seen, but remained entirely secluded in the palace at the ancient capital, Kioto. He knew nothing of his subjects and was unknown by them.

And Wick also learned that this emperor who so cordially shook his hand was the one hundred and twenty-first emperor of his line, and was believed to have descended from Jimmu Tenno, the first emperor, who reigned six hundred and sixty years before the birth of our Saviour.

His Majesty said something with a pleasant smile and the interpreter translated it, addressing Mr. Ralston :

"I am very glad to meet you, sir. I did not know that I should have the great pleasure of making your honored acquaintance before the formal reception which I had planned to give you within a few days. The reception will be held as usual, but certain happenings connected with our official relations has made it necessary for you to see me to-day. I wanted to see my young friend, your son, whom I had the pleasure of meeting yesterday morning at our palace on Lake Hakone. I presume he has told you of our little adventure?"

Mr. Ralston's surprise was manifest. He glanced

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from the emperor to Wick, and then replied respectfully:

"Your Majesty will pardon me, but I did not know—that is, my son told me he had met a very exalted personage after escaping from the island, but he thought it was some prince. This is extraordinary, most extraordinary, your Majesty."

The emperor smiled.

"It is a little surprise I had planned, that is all. Your son's statement interested me greatly, as you will understand, and I thought he would talk more freely if he did not know my rank. And now I would like a few words with you in private."

The emperor added something to the interpreter, who said quickly to Wick:

"His Majesty will be pleased to see you again during your stay in Nippon—perhaps at the next garden party. Until then he wishes you good-by."

Wick, won by the cordial smile and bow of the emperor, smiled in return. Captain Komatsu saluted, then, taking Wick's arm with boyish friendliness, escorted him from the apartment, both backing out with many obeisances. The audience was at an end.

"While waiting for your honored father," announced the young officer as they walked down the long corri-

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dor, "we will look over the palace grounds. We think they are very beautiful, and I know you will enjoy seeing them."

"My head is still turning around," laughed Wick. "I never felt so completely bowled over in my life. So that was the emperor, after all. Cricky! and I talked to him as if he was only an ordinary man. How he must have laughed at me!"

"His Majesty thoroughly enjoyed the interview at his inland palace," replied Captain Komatsu. "I would be afraid to tell you all the nice things he said about you."

Wick actually blushed.

"I hope you won't," he protested. "But I want to say right here that your emperor is a fine man. I tell you, my ideas of kings and such people have had what we call a jolt. If they are all as kind and good as the Mikado they're all right."

It was at least a half hour before Mr. Ralston left the palace and joined Wick, but the time had passed rapidly to the latter in the entertaining company of the young officer. Captain Komatsu was given a cordial invitation to visit the legation, then the palace carriage with its escort of cavalry whirled Wick and his father away again.

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The boys were in front of the building awaiting the return. Mr. Ralston requested them to step into his private office.

"This has been an eventful twenty-four hours," he began, motioning them to be seated. "The mystery is a mystery no longer, however, and I think the affair of Mr. Beaumont and of the man you know as Mr. Girard can be considered settled."

"The man we know as Mr. Girard?" echoed Wick in surprise.

Mr. Ralston nodded gravely.

"Yes," he replied. "His name is not Girard, and he is not an Englishman. He is a member of the Russian Secret Service, and his real name is Paslof. All of you know how the war between Russia and Japan is progressing. Well, during the past few months Russia has become desperate, and as a final resort she has attempted to involve other nations, notably England and Germany, in the war. Every possible ruse has been utilized, and among others this man Paslof was sent here to see what he could do with the United States Legation. It is a long story, and I will give you only the important details. It seems that Paslof met Mr. Beaumont in Europe—at Monte Carlo, I believe—and gained some influence over him through a gambling

affair. He used this influence and a promise of money to compel Beaumont to join him in an attempt to sell me some forged documents supposed to contain a secret alliance between Japan and England involving the seizure of the Philippine Islands. It was a clever plot, as Beaumont's connection with the British Embassy would lend color to his claim that he had secured certain incriminating documents from the embassy's archives. I do not say, understand me, that I would have bought the documents, but my duty would have compelled me to communicate with Washington. There would have been an investigation, and diplomatic communications both with Tokyo and London."

"Both governments would have denied it," spoke up Larry, deeply interested.

"Naturally—even if they had been guilty," replied Mr. Ralston with a diplomatic smile. "The danger would have come from the possibility of the secret reaching the press, and you know what a sensation that would create. Some of our yellow journals would have declared war in a day; harsh accusations may have passed, and—who knows?—perhaps the United States would have been forced into the affair. No; the plot was ingenuous, and extremely dangerous, too."

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"Did you find anything in that paper?" asked Wick, glancing toward the desk.

His father nodded emphatically.

"That proved to be the missing link in the chain of evidence against Paslof," he replied. "The Japanese Government has had reason to suspect such an attempt on the part of the Russian Government, and they even suspected Girard, or Paslof, but they had nothing to go on until you overheard the conversation in the train. Even after you told His Majesty the emperor of the conversation, there was no actual proof. But the paper, which the authorities had translated in a way of their own, supplied everything necessary to convict him."

"Then I did some good after all," murmured Wick.

His father smiled his assent.

"One thing stands out pretty clearly," commented Larry. "It is a mistake to talk too much in public."

"Paslof should have known better, but he saw in Wick and Betty only two runaway boys from an English or American ship, and he hadn't the least idea Wick was my son and that he understood French."

"What will they do with Mr. Beaumont and Girard, or Paslof?" asked Larry.

"Mr. Beaumont has been surrendered to the British Ambassador," replied Mr. Ralston gravely. "There is

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no question about his punishment by his Government. It is the usual course when a member of the diplomatic corps commits a crime to leave him to his Government. As for Paslof, I am afraid he will either be shot or confined for life. His status is that of a spy in time of war."

"And Utamaro and Tenaka?" asked Wick eagerly. "Didn't you speak to the emperor about them?"

"Yes. His Majesty will give orders to have Utamaro placed where he will be taken care of, and he also said he would give Tenaka an appointment to the naval academy at Idajima."

"Good!" exclaimed Wick in great delight. "Oh, I am so glad he has done that! Tenaka is a fine fellow, and his future is assured. Won't he be glad!"

When the boys started to leave the room, Mr. Ralston asked Wick to remain for a few minutes.

"Now, while we are talking, my son," said the diplomat, "we might as well take up the question of Betty, as you call him."

"You must do something for him, sure," replied Wick earnestly. "He's alone in the world; he hasn't any place to go, and I can't see him turned loose. No, father, I——"

"I am glad to see that you have such a kind heart,"

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interrupted his father approvingly. "It speaks well for your success in life. I am sure we can take care of Betty. Do you think he would care to go to school and complete his education?"

Wick shook his head.

"I am afraid not," he replied; "not to school. Betty would rather go to sea, or do something like that."

"But he knows nothing about navigation."

"He can learn that in time. Now, if he could get a billet on board a steamer running to Yokohama——"

"That would be comparatively easy. I'll write to the general manager of the Pacific Mail, whom I know personally. I think we can consider Betty's career settled."

The two boys were awaiting Wick in the corridor. Larry was deeply interested in Mr. Ralston's explanation, but Betty seemed more intent on Wick's interview with the Mikado.

"Bedaddle! will you let me shake the hand that shook the hand of the Emperor of Japan?" grinned the stout boy.

"I'll let you feel the boot that felt the floor of the emperor's palace if you don't quit your kidding," laughed Wick. "Now, if you ordinary chaps will come for a walk, I'll tell you the latest. It will be in the form of a story of one chapter, and entitled,

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'How I Met the Mikado of Japan, and Almost Fainted.'"

When Wick reached that part of his narrative connected with Betty's future, the stout boy displayed such wild enthusiasm that Larry had to threaten to call the police.

"And do you mean that I can get on board one of those corking big steamers running between San Francisco and Yokohama?" Betty cried.

"Father said he would be able to secure an appointment of some kind for you," replied Wick. "It won't be the captain's billet, and probably not the chief engineer's, but you will have a chance to learn and to rise in rank. When you arrive at Yokohama you can run up here and stay a day or two with Larry and me."

"Bedaddle! I am so happy," grinned Betty, "that I'll let you fellows call me by my full name. Any time you wish to say Jehoshabeath Calkins Budd, just fire away. I won't care a bit."

In due time Mr. Ralston's efforts were successful. Betty, accompanied by Wick and Larry, traveled down to Yokohama, where the stout boy boarded one of the Pacific Mail liners as a cadet apprentice. The minister's influence secured him the favor of one of the ship's officers, and he is in a fair way to obtain a thorough edu-

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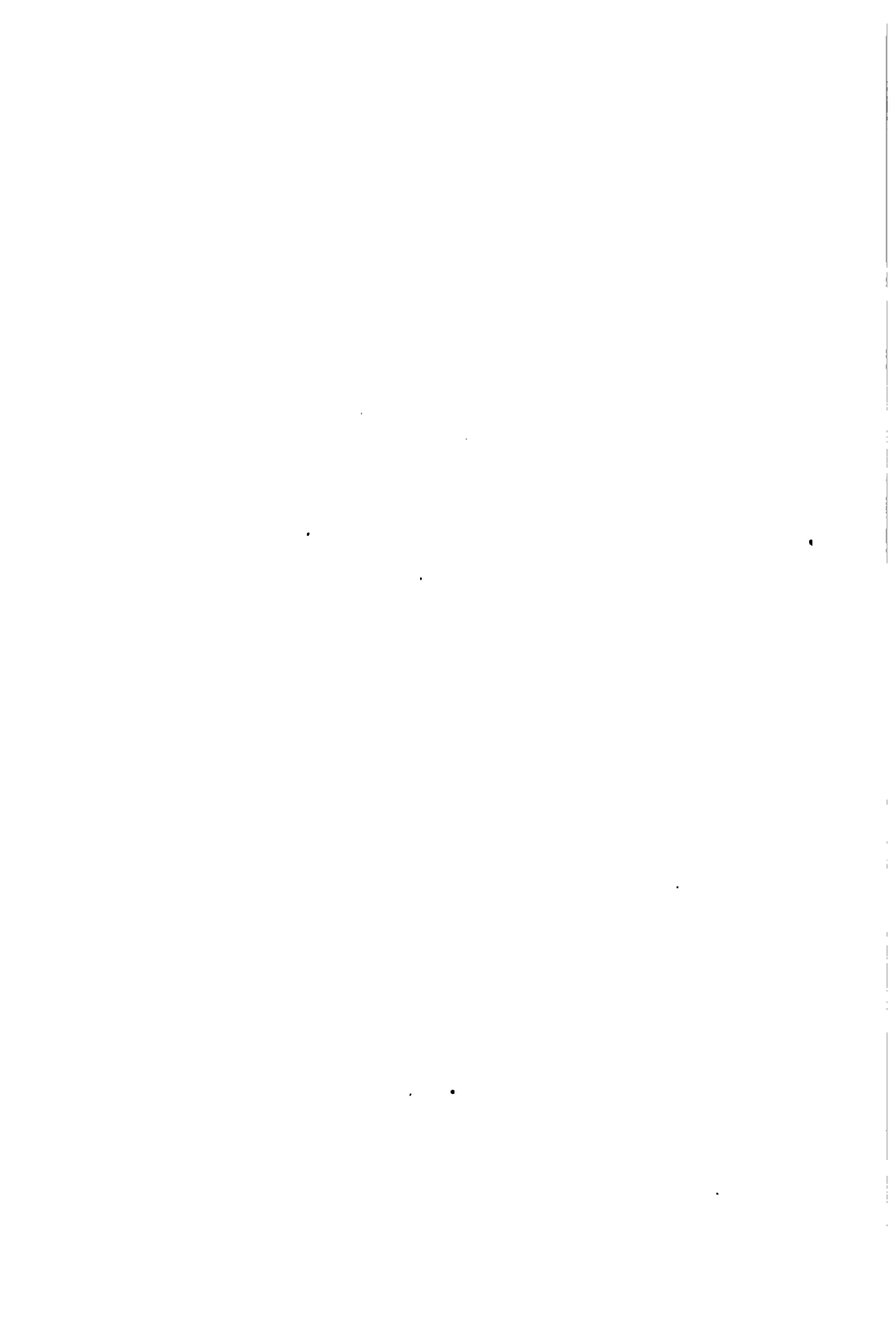
cation in navigation. He never fails to visit Tokyo when his ship reaches port, and invariably takes delight in referring to his friend, the friend of the Emperor of Japan.

Tenaka secured his appointment as a naval cadet in the Japanese service, and he, too, visits the American Legation at Tokyo, where he is a most welcome guest.

As for Wick and Larry, their life ambition is in a fair way to be realized. Both boys began special courses in instruction calculated to fit them for appointment as undersecretaries in the diplomatic service of the United States, and as their connection with the now famous Paslof plot is well known at Washington, there is little doubt that their names will in time be added to the list of diplomatic officials in the Department of State.

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